

HISTORY OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR



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**FREE
SUPPLEMENT
INSIDE**

Blitzkrieg!

HISTORY OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

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Blitzkrieg Before the

Europe March/September 1939

Donald C Watt

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The five months separating Britain's guarantee to Poland from Germany's onslaught on that country were hectic ones. Throughout that long summer the diplomats bluffed, blandished, threatened, parleyed, bargained; the stakes were high, the tension enormous. At first it looked as if Hitler might be contained; then came the diplomatic shock which paralysed the West, the *volte-face* of Soviet Russia. Finally, when it became too late for negotiations, smaller nations found themselves the pawns of greater powers—and the major powers seemed themselves to be the pawns of fate

On March 15, 1939, German troops invaded Czechoslovakia and occupied Prague. Two days later Chamberlain, in a public speech at Birmingham, accused Hitler of breaking his word. On March 22, German troops occupied the old German city of Memel in Lithuania, forcing that state to sign a treaty conceding Memel's return to Germany. Recognising a parallel between Memel and the old German port of Danzig in Poland, the Poles announced, on March 28, that any German attempt to alter Danzig's status without Polish consent would lead to war. On March 31, Britain extended to Poland a unilateral guarantee against German aggression. Diplomatic talks began between the West and the Soviet Union.

THE LAST SIX MONTHS OF PEACE

April 7: Italy invades the Balkan state of Albania.
April 17: Diplomatic talks begin between Germany and the Soviet Union.
April 28: Hitler cancels the Anglo-German naval agreement of 1935 and the German-Polish non-aggression agreement of 1934.
May 4: Molotov replaces Litvinov as Soviet Foreign Minister.

May 22: Ribbentrop and Ciano sign the 'Pact of Steel' to weld together Europe's strongest Fascist dictatorships; Japan is asked to join the alliance.

June 3: Nazi-controlled Danzig complains of too many Polish customs officials. Poland's caustic reply meets with a new barrage of Nazi propaganda, and rumours of an impending Nazi *coup* sweep the country.

July 24: Britain, France, and Russia agree to offer mutual assistance should any of the three be attacked. But the pact is not to come into operation until corresponding military agreements are reached.

August 23: Ribbentrop and Molotov sign a non-aggression pact between Berlin and Moscow. The pact includes a secret annex that divides eastern Europe between Germany and the Soviet Union.

August 25: Hitler schedules the attack on Poland for the next day, but revokes the orders when Mussolini informs him that Italy is not prepared for war.

August 31: Hitler again orders the attack on Poland.

September 1: At 0445 hours, without declaring war, Germany launches its attack on Poland.

September 2: Chamberlain sends his ultimatum to Hitler: if Germany does not withdraw her troops immediately she must consider herself at war with Britain.

September 3: Hitler receives the ultimatum and ignores it. Britain is at war with Germany.



Central Press

APRIL:

BIDS FROM THE KREMLIN

The British action in guaranteeing Poland completely transformed the scene; it upset the Soviet authorities, who saw in it a further indication of British unwillingness to treat them as a serious partner. Litvinov declared that the Soviet government had had enough and would stand apart from any further commitments. He made a further attempt to negotiate on his own with the Baltic states, and instituted further soundings in south-eastern Europe. But this reaction was short-lived. The realisation in the Kremlin that the British guarantee was meaningless without Russian support encouraged the Soviets to raise their demands on Britain, and on April 6 their Foreign Minister raised the question of Anglo-Russian staff agreements. On April 18 Litvinov proposed a ten-year alliance between Britain, France, and the Soviet Union.

Hitler's target

If Britain was really determined to defend Poland against Germany then, the Soviet authorities must have reasoned, she had to have an alliance with Russia. Without it Poland could not be defended. If Britain was still hoping for an accommodation with Hitler, then she would refuse the offer of the alliance. At the same time, however, the Soviet authorities seem to have determined to test their assumption, formed from their knowledge of the German negotiations with Japan, that Hitler's real target was the Western democracies. Early in April Russian diplomatic representatives began hinting in Berlin that the Soviet Union was interested in improving her relations with Germany, still strained as they were by Ribbentrop's attempt to get an agreement with the Poles.

Italy invades Albania

Nor was this the end of the repercussions of the occupation of Prague and the British guarantee to Poland. Hitler's action in Prague had outraged Mussolini—who took great pride in the role of peacemaker he had played at Munich. Italian prestige made it essential, in his view, for Italy not to be outdone by Hitler in the use of force to advance national interests. He felt, moreover, bitterly insulted by Hitler's failure to give him any reasonable warning before the move against Prague. He decided, therefore, without warning Germany, to put an end to the semi-protectorate Italy had long enjoyed over Albania, the small Slav mountain state on the borders of Greece and Yugoslavia, just across the Adriatic from the heel of Italy itself. On April 5 General Keitel and General Pariani, the chiefs of the German and Italian armed forces, met in Innsbruck to discuss the division of operations in the event of a war with the Western democracies; no mention of Italy's designs on Albania was made to the Germans—yet even as General Pariani's train left Innsbruck for Italy the Italian forces moved to the attack.

The Italian invasion of Albania at once led the British to widen the scope of their guarantees, since they were convinced that Mussolini must have concerted it with Hitler. They had already been considering the possi-



◀ Russian Foreign Minister Litvinov (left) tried hard to secure co-operation between Russia and the Allies

Molotov, right, shown shaking hands with his German counterpart Ribbentrop, was much tougher than Litvinov, the man he replaced ▶



bility of linking a guarantee for Rumania with a strengthening of the old Polish-Rumanian alliance. Now they were in the process of trying to persuade Rumania's partners in the so-called 'Balkan Entente'—Yugoslavia, Greece, and Turkey—to come into a collective guarantee of Rumania. So far as their negotiations with the Soviet Union were concerned, the outright refusal of the Polish Foreign Minister, Colonel Beck, during his visit to London at the beginning of April, to be party to any agreement with Soviet Russia, seemed to them to leave them no alternative but to play down their negotiations with the Soviets and try to find some way of keeping them in reserve, without driving Poland and, still more, Rumania into Germany's arms. The reaction of the three Baltic states in rejecting Litvinov's approaches in favour of agreement with Germany only strengthened them in their views.

Italy's action (which the British wrongly presumed to have been co-ordinated with Hitler) now seemed to demand the extension of their guarantee system to Greece and even to Turkey. To some extent this would make their guarantees even less credible; but on the other hand it offered the chance of producing a solid Balkan bloc against the Axis powers. This would especially be the case if Bulgaria could be persuaded to drop her old enmity with Rumania and Greece and enter the Balkan pact. On April 13 Anglo-French guarantees were therefore issued to Rumania, and Greece and Turkey replied to enquiries that in principle they would be prepared to exchange similar guarantees with Britain. The Turks further undertook to approach the Bulgarian government with a view to her possible inclusion in the proposed bloc.

The French hand

In the meantime the French government tried to play its own hand in the negotiations for an alliance with the Soviet Union. Georges Bonnet, the French Foreign Minister, suggested on April 15 that an annex be signed to the Franco-Soviet pact of 1935, pledging Russia to come to France's aid if she were attacked by Germany as a result of her giving assistance to Poland and Rumania. This, however, conflicted both

with Britain's desire for urgency, and with a certain anxiety the British Foreign Office was beginning to feel at the absence of any Soviet equivalent to the British guarantees of Poland, Rumania, and Greece and to the projected guarantee for Turkey. Seen from London, the Soviet government seemed to be giving remarkably little in return for the indirect guarantees of her own security involved in the British underwriting of Poland and Rumania. On April 15, therefore, the British ambassador in Moscow, Sir William Seeds, invited Litvinov to declare a parallel guarantee of Poland and Rumania, one to match that given already by Britain.

The proposal was an unhappy one in itself, being so much less than the offer of assistance which the Russians were convinced they had already made. But when taken with the evidence of British involvement in Turkey, it raised ancestral Russian fears of British entry into the Black Sea and British hegemony in the Balkans. On April 22 the Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister, Vladimir Potemkin, was dispatched on a tour of the Balkan capitals to investigate how far the plans to develop a Balkan bloc under British leadership had gone. In the meantime, Litvinov made what was to be his last proposal for a collective pact against Germany. On April 18 he proposed a ten-year Anglo-Franco-Soviet alliance against German aggression whether against the signatories themselves or against the states of eastern Europe.

An unwelcome alliance

Litvinov's proposal was rejected. The British were trying to create a state of affairs which would lead Hitler to a conference table, not a military alliance to destroy him. In their view an Anglo-Franco-Soviet alliance would be unwelcome to Poland and Rumania; it would take much too long to negotiate, and was unnecessary anyway, since Britain was already firmly committed to Poland, Rumania, and to Turkey. Hitler's policy, as they saw it, was to create the maximum degree of apprehension among Germany's neighbours for the minimum effort, but not to move against them, unless he thought he could avoid provoking general war. A strengthening of the Balkan Entente and the Polish-Rumanian

alliance with British backing and the promise of Soviet aid—if it should be needed and wanted—would be quite enough, in the British view, to restrain him.

**MAY:
WEBS OF DIPLOMACY**

The rejection of Litvinov's proposal—when taken with the evidence of British diplomatic success in the Balkans and of Balkan resistance to Soviet help against Germany—must have seemed suspicious in Moscow, even though Potemkin said he was satisfied. Everywhere the Soviets were being welcomed only as an adjunct to British policy, an insurance against its failure to bring Hitler to see reason; everywhere British initiative and leadership were paramount—in the Baltic, in the Balkans, and in Poland and Rumania. The Soviet Union was

still outside the circle. On Potemkin's arrival in Ankara on April 29, he remained virtually inactive for four days. On May 4 the news of Litvinov's dismissal from office and replacement by Stalin's right-hand man, Vyacheslav Molotov, burst upon a startled world.

It was as startling to the Germans as to the West. During April, Hitler must have begun to feel a little hemmed in by what German propaganda persisted in calling the British encirclement policy. His diplomats, it is true, did score a minor success in the north by blocking the Russian attempt to negotiate non-aggression pacts with Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania, and getting them to accept non-aggression pacts with Germany instead. But similar pressure on the Turks in Ankara and on the Rumanian Foreign Minister failed to detach either from the

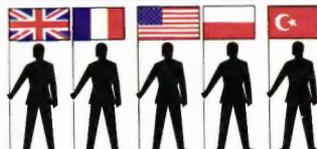
British-inspired 'front'. And to make matters worse, the British made their commitment to a continental war clear on April 26 when the Minister for War, Mr Leslie Hore-Belisha, announced the introduction of conscription in Britain. And, in addition, the German diplomats were getting no further with their alliance negotiations with the Japanese.

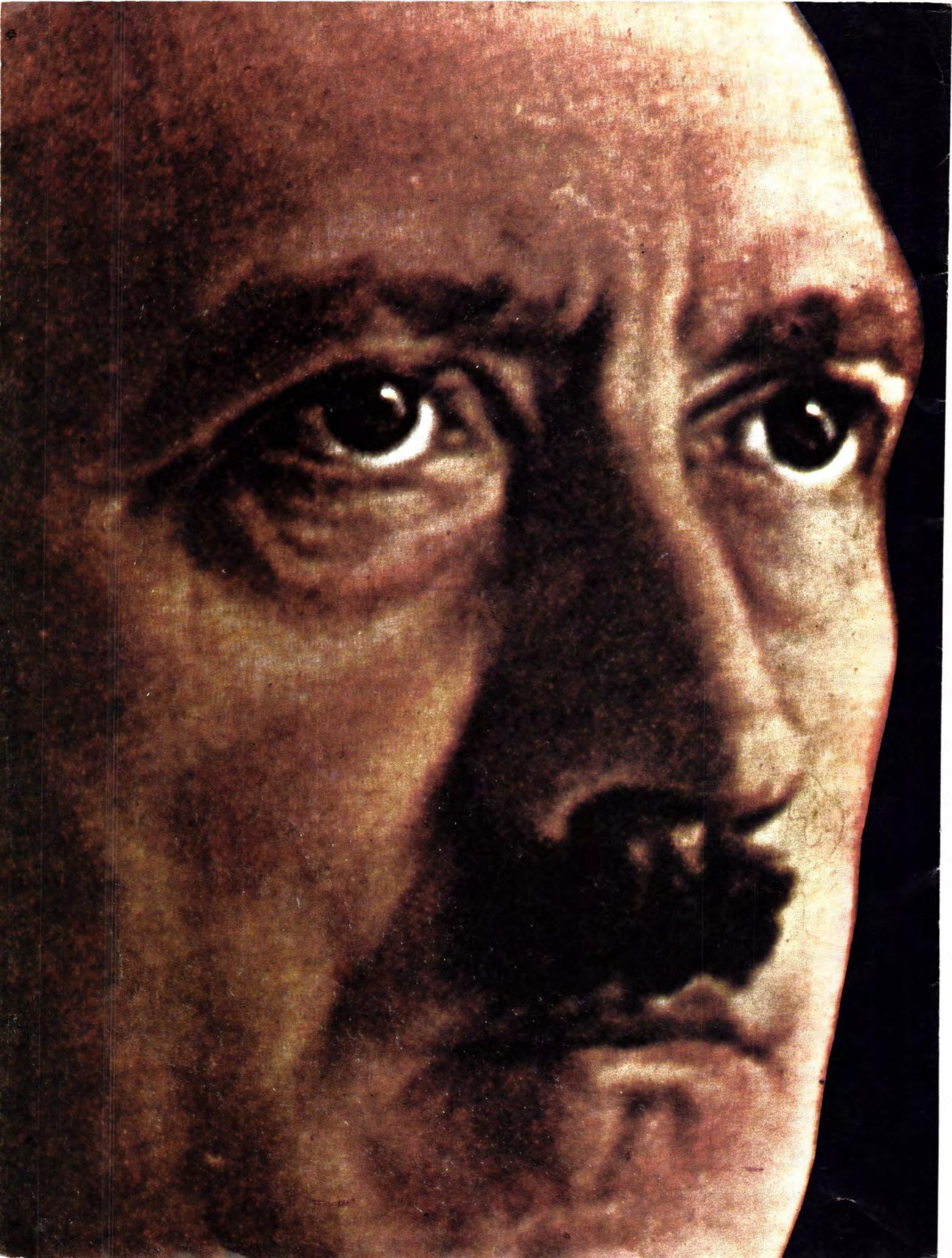
Denunciation by Hitler

Hitler reacted as might have been expected to the British introduction of conscription. On April 28, at Wilhelmshaven, he denounced both the German-Polish non-aggression pact and the 1935 naval agreement with Britain—the two treaties he had always cited when rebutting accusations that he did not keep his word in treaty



Europe on the eve of war. Britain is allied with France, Poland, and Turkey and has an understanding with the USA. Germany is allied with Italy, and has an understanding and non-aggression pact with the USSR





obligations. In fact, there were good technical reasons from Germany's point of view why the naval agreement had to be denounced: Germany was just about to lay down two new battleships which the agreement's terms clearly prohibited. The gesture was no doubt a satisfying one for Hitler, but it could not have been said to have improved his diplomatic position. Indeed, he was rapidly losing patience with diplomacy.

On May 6 Ribbentrop was to meet his Italian opposite number, Count Ciano, in Milan, to propose a bilateral German-Italian alliance to which Japan could accede when her internal disagreements had finally been resolved. But Hitler saw that a German-Italian alliance was hardly likely on its own to restrain Britain and France and leave him free to attack Poland, so long as Britain and France could rely on the prospect of Soviet support. If he could detach the Soviet Union from the West, this would be quite a different matter.

Feelers to Russia

The idea of a German-Soviet pact had never been completely abandoned in German military and diplomatic circles. There was always a small group who remembered how Germany—when she was forbidden to possess tanks or other heavy weapons on her own soil—had conducted tank exercises in the 1920's with the Red Army and had manufactured poison gas, with Soviet connivance, on Russian soil. In those days enmity towards Poland had been the strongest link between Germany and Soviet Russia, and there were always those who regretted the ending of German-Soviet collaboration and the conclusion of the non-aggression pact with Poland in the first year after Hitler's coming to power in 1933.

It is hardly surprising, then, that the deterioration of German-Polish relations at the end of March 1939 should have turned people's minds to the idea of reviving the old friendship with the Soviet Union. In fact, the idea first seems to have been ventilated in Hitler's *entourage* at the end of March. It received added support when on April 15 Mussolini roundly advised Göring that Germany should take up good relations with the Soviet Union. Hitler and Ribbentrop, however, must have regarded the idea as quite unrealistic, as Litvinov's sudden dismissal seems to have taken them quite by surprise.

Anxious debate in Berlin

It seemed to them, however, that they ought to exploit the removal of Litvinov—whom they disliked as much for his Jewishness and his British wife as for his support for the League of Nations and collective action against aggression. The German ambassador in Moscow, von Schulenburg, was hastily recalled from Teheran, where he had been acting as German representative at an official Persian function, and there followed ten days of anxious debate in Berlin before it was decided to test the ground. Schulenburg returned to Moscow to seek an interview with Molotov. At this interview, on May 20, he very diplomatically broached the idea of reopening the conversations on the conclusion of a German-Soviet trade agreement which had been broken off in March. Molotov's answer, that commercial

talks were meaningless without a political agreement, was so rudely phrased as to cause a fresh wave of indecision in Berlin. So it was not until May 30 that Schulenburg again approached Molotov—this time in a spirit of desperation rather than expectancy. For, in the meantime, on May 24, Chamberlain had announced that agreement between Britain and the Soviet Union was imminent.

Two days before this, however, Ribbentrop and Ciano had finally signed the treaty of alliance known as the 'Pact of Steel'. At the same time an urgent telegram had been sent to Tokyo asking for Japanese accession to the treaty. On May 23 Hitler felt sufficiently sure of himself to reveal his plans to his generals; his speech made it clear that he had decided to attack Poland 'at the first available opportunity'. The conquest of Poland would open the way to the Baltic states, give Germany large extra areas of agricultural land and slave labour, and remove the danger of Polish attack in the event of a show-down with the West.

War was inevitable; but first Poland must be isolated. If Britain and France intervened, then the fight must be primarily with them; if Russia came in on their side then Britain and France must be attacked with 'a few devastating blows' synchronised with the occupation of the Belgian and Dutch air bases. ('Britain is our enemy and the show-down with Britain is a matter of life or death.') If Russia came in, it would also be possible to restrain her by inciting Japan against her. On the other hand, Hitler added, it was not impossible that Russia might show herself uninterested in Poland.

Hitler's war plans

Hitler then ordered the formation of a small planning staff, drawn from all three services, to consider the problems of war with Britain. As he saw it, the first task was to defeat France and occupy Belgium and the Netherlands; after this all German war production could be turned to the Luftwaffe and the fleet, with the aim of blockading Britain into surrender. In the meantime 1943-44 was set as the completion date for the German armaments programme.

In his speech Hitler thus made it clear that he intended to attack Poland that year and that he hoped to be able to do it without drawing in Britain and France. Poland had to be isolated, and it was to this task that German diplomacy was now turned. The isolation of Poland involved essentially three tasks: the detachment of Rumania from the alliance with Poland, the detachment of the Soviet Union from the Western democracies, and the weakening of support for Poland in Britain and France. On the wider plane German diplomacy continued to do its best to keep the Polish question on the boil; to press Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Rumania to abandon any idea of a neutralist bloc in the Balkans; to stir up trouble in the Middle East and to wean Turkey away from her new attachment to Britain; to further its attempts to bring Japan into the Pact of Steel.

In the meantime the military planning against Poland went steadily forward; and there was a certain amount of trouble with the new state of Slovakia—which had been formed from the remains of Czechoslovakia

after Munich—over the concentration of German troops building up opposite Poland's southern frontier.

The British government, for its part, had been severely shaken by Litvinov's fall. Everything seemed up to that point to have been going reasonably successfully in the negotiations with Russia. Britain had, in fact, just been about to propose to the Russians a formula which would have ensured a maximum deterrent effect without seeming to commit Poland and Rumania to direct relations with the Soviet Union. It would also, it was believed, have allayed Russian fears, since the proposed Russian declaration of support for the Western allies was only to become operative once Britain and France had honoured their guarantees to Poland or Rumania.

On May 6 Sir William Seeds was instructed to put the plan to Molotov—an experience he found to be profoundly disturbing. Molotov cross-examined him relentlessly, especially on whether there were to be staff conversations with Russia. Three days later *Izvestiya*, one of the Soviet Union's two leading papers, attacked the new British formula as one which would leave the brunt of any resistance to German aggression to the Soviet Union, and revived for the first time the question of a direct German attack on Russia through the Baltic states of Lithuania and Latvia.

Russia seeks a pact

As the Soviet ambassador in London told Halifax the same day, there was no reciprocity. The Soviet Union would be obliged to help Britain and France if Hitler attacked Poland or Rumania, but Britain and France were under no obligation to help the Soviet Union. A formal reply on these lines, arguing that a direct Anglo-Franco-Soviet alliance with concrete military agreements was essential, was presented on May 15. The following day the Soviet ambassador made it clear that the point about a possible German attack through the Baltic states was mainly included to strengthen the argument. The real point was the Soviet demand for a pact of mutual assistance.

Price of Soviet support

What was the Soviet government up to? A clue is provided by an *Izvestiya* article on May 11. The German-Italian alliance, it said, was not directed against the Soviet Union but against Britain and France. Yet British policy (this argument implied) was based on an attempt to get the Soviet Union to do Britain the favour of completing the dam she was trying to build against Germany. In return for what? Nothing. The whole policy pursued by Molotov from May 7 onwards was one of trying to see what could be extracted from the two sides—both of which, according to the Soviet way of thinking, were capitalist, both imperialist, and both obviously set in head-on collision courses.

This Soviet attitude the British government took some time to appreciate. The idea of negotiating with the Soviet Union was itself distasteful to some members of the British government and embarrassingly difficult to reconcile with the wishes of those countries Britain had guaranteed—Poland and Rumania. Others—among them

Churchill, Eden, Vansittart, and their supporters in Parliament—were so obsessed by the need to contain Germany that their normal critical powers were blunted. They could see only the need for speed, and feared that the Soviets would elude Britain's invitation.

No one seems to have seen that the price of Soviet support in eastern Europe would prove one that the Western allies could not, and Germany could easily, afford: Soviet supremacy over the Baltic states and parts of Poland. It took Molotov ten weeks to realise that he was not going to extract from Britain hegemony over the whole of Poland and Rumania—and that he might as well settle for what Germany had to offer.

The British dilemma

In these ten weeks he was to exert himself to raise the British and French offers as much as he could. The first step came on May 27. Molotov's rejection of the British guarantee formula had put the British in an embarrassing dilemma; it appeared that a direct pact with Russia was now unavoidable, for an agreement with Russia now seemed the only way that Poland and Rumania could be aided and Hitler restrained. If negotiations broke down now, at the very least Hitler would feel that he had a free hand again, and there might even be a direct Nazi-Soviet agreement. If Germany was going to attack in the west it seemed essential to the Western powers that the Soviet Union should join their side in the war.

On the other hand, it was argued, a direct pact with Russia would look as if Britain had decided that war was inevitable and that she was forming an ideological bloc against Germany. In such a case Italy, Franco's Spain, Portugal, Finland, and Yugoslavia might well join Germany. Vatican influence could well be thrown to the anti-Soviet—that is, the German—side. Japan would be thoroughly hostile. Would the British public urge Britain to come to Russia's aid if Germany attacked her? The British Chiefs-of-Staff did not rate Russian aid very highly in the event of war with Germany. And there was the continuing refusal of Poland, Rumania, and the Baltic states to be associated in any way with the Soviet Union; if a British alliance with the Soviets were to drive them all over to the German camp, the whole point of concluding such an alliance would be destroyed.

The British solution was to draft a pact which linked to the League of Nations Covenant any aid given to Russia by Britain and France (or vice versa) and to add this pact to their earlier drafts providing for Soviet aid to Britain and France if they were involved in war with any power, as a result of its aggression against any state they had guaranteed or which appealed for their assistance. Provision was made for staff talks—but none, however, for advance Soviet consultation with the states that Britain and France had guaranteed. These, in deference to their susceptibilities were not named, and the rights and position of other powers were expressly reserved. The Soviet ambassador in London liked the draft and remarked that agreement should now be possible. On the strength of this assur-

ance, Chamberlain announced to the House of Commons—where embarrassing questions had been raised about the seriousness of British purpose in negotiating with the Soviet Union—that the conclusion of an agreement with the Soviet Union was imminent.

He was to be rudely disabused of this notion. On May 27 Molotov rejected any mention of the League. Britain, he said, was apparently satisfied with a pact which would allow Russia to be bombed from the air while at Geneva some minor state like Bolivia blocked all counteraction. To Molotov the British proposals seemed calculated to ensure the maximum of talk and the minimum of results.

Molotov's real intentions were revealed in his attack on the clause which reserved the rights and position of the states Britain and France had guaranteed. He demanded that further guarantees be extended to cover these Baltic states and Finland, and reiterated this point strongly on May 31 in a widely publicised speech to the Supreme Soviet. The British ambassador in Moscow commented ruefully on his interview: 'It is my fate to deal with a man totally ignorant of foreign affairs and to whom the idea of negotiation as distinct from imposing the will of his party leader is utterly alien.'

JUNE:

STALEMATE WITH RUSSIA

On June 2 Molotov presented the Soviet counter-proposals. First, the states to be guaranteed must be enumerated in the text of the treaty; the list included three states in the east—Finland, Estonia, and Latvia—and Belgium in the west, all of which had repeatedly declared their unwillingness to accept any guarantees. Second, the Russians demanded that the political terms of any agreement between the Soviet Union and the Western powers should not come into force until an agreement on military assistance and co-operation had been concluded between the three powers.

Much disturbed, Lord Halifax, the British Foreign Secretary, recalled Sir William Seeds for consultations; and, when illness prevented Seeds from travelling, a senior official in the Foreign Office was dispatched to aid him in explaining Britain's standpoint to Molotov. At their first meeting on June 15, they had to face a new barrage of questions from Molotov on the attitude of Poland, Rumania, and the Baltic states. The next day, a new Soviet note accused the British of refusing to consider coming to the Soviet's aid if the Soviet Union supported the Baltic states against Germany. On June 22 Molotov rejected fresh British proposals as 'carelessly drafted' and, on June 29, none other than Stalin's right-hand man on internal matters, Zhdanov, voiced Russia's impatience in an article in *Pravda*. The Soviet insistence that a common guarantee of the three Baltic states should be included in the treaty, despite the strong protests of those states against such guarantees being made, led Seeds to presume that what the Soviet leaders really wanted was an international warrant enabling them to intervene in the Baltic states without the consent—and contrary to the wishes of—their governments.

JULY:

FOCUS ON DANZIG

In a further interview on July 1, Molotov provided Seeds with more material for his suspicions. Seeds had been instructed to yield to the Soviet demands on the Baltic but to ask in return that the treaty be extended to cover the Netherlands and Switzerland. Molotov at once objected to this as a further extension of Soviet commitments and demanded compensation in the form of Polish and Rumanian alliances with the Soviet Union—a proposal which the governments of these countries, allied with each other against the Soviets as they had been since the 1920's, would never have conceded, since they feared Russian aid as much as or more than German aggression.

Molotov further demanded that the treaty should be operative in the event of 'indirect aggression' against the countries named—a concept which he defined as 'an internal *coup d'état* or a reversal of policy in the interests of the aggressor', and which he justified by referring to the German *coup* in Prague in March. It needed little imagination in London to see that Molotov's definition could also cover Soviet action against any government they disliked and distrusted.

But Molotov stuck to this point and to his demand for the simultaneous conclusion of a military agreement, despite British protests throughout July; on July 23, however, he suddenly demanded that military talks should begin forthwith, expressing the belief that these points would present little difficulty once the military got together.

In the meantime, the other British negotiations to secure a front against Hitler were running into difficulties. Agreement with Turkey was fairly easily secured, but the Rumanians were easily scared by German and Hungarian pressure into making specific demands which had the effect of rendering the British guarantee virtually inoperative. The Italians remained at odds with France, for no amount of pressure could make the French see any point in yielding to Italy's demands for territorial concessions—a point of view strongly supported by the new British ambassador in Rome, tough-minded Sir Percy Loraine.

Japanese fury

In the Far East, elements of the Japanese army, furious at the resistance put up by the Japanese Foreign Office and navy in Tokyo to the conclusion of an anti-British alliance with the Axis, tried to force a state of war between Britain and Japan by blockading the British settlement at Tientsin in northern China and subjecting British citizens who attempted to pass through these posts to vulgar and humiliating indignities. Fortunately, the skill of the British ambassador in Tokyo, Sir Robert Craigie, was sufficient to avoid a total breakdown of Anglo-Japanese relations.

Danzig killing

German-Polish relations were meanwhile deteriorating steadily—especially in the always tense area of relations between the Poles and the Nazi-dominated government of the Free City of Danzig. On May 20, a Danziger was shot after an organised demonstration against the Polish customs

house inside the boundary of Danzig. The dead man subsequently turned out to have been a member of the Danzig SA; the killer was the chauffeur of the Polish Acting Commissioner in Danzig. On June 3 the President of the Senate of Danzig complained of the increasing number of Polish customs officials (31 had been added since May 20 to the existing total of 75) and ordered Danzig officials to accept no further instructions from them. A week later the Poles replied by refusing to restrict the activities of their customs inspectors and even threatened to increase their number still further.

This retort provoked a rush of German propaganda attacks on Poland, especially during the visit of Dr Goebbels, then Nazi Minister of Propaganda, in mid-June; the attacks were so violent that by the end of June there was a new 'week-end scare' with widespread rumours that the Germans were going to stage a *coup* in Danzig. These rumours became more worrisome when it became known that the Danzig Senate had allowed the formation of a volunteer defence corps and had imported arms from East Prussia.

Comment in the Polish press gained in intensity and, on June 29, Lord Halifax felt impelled to give a strong public warning,

made in a speech to the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London, that Britain would resist any new act of aggression in Europe. On July 19 the Poles complained again of the difficulties placed in the way of the Polish customs officials in Danzig and announced economic reprisals against a Danzig margarine factory, and against the import of Danzig herrings into Poland. At the end of July their complaints were rebutted by the Danzig authorities. During all this turmoil, preparations continued in Danzig for a German take-over at Hitler's command, and the German press continued its propaganda barrage against Poland and Britain.

It was under these circumstances that elements in the British government made a singularly ill-advised attempt to bring to a culmination the policy of appeasement embarked upon two years before. The motive behind this policy had been to convince Hitler that Britain would block any attempt to obtain his way by force, but would not stand in the way of peaceful change in Europe. The policy thus depended on the belief that Hitler would respond to a judicious combination of the stick and carrot.

The aim of British policy since March 31, 1939, had been to convince Hitler that any further aggression would run into the

combined opposition of all the other powers in Europe. By June some people felt that perhaps he should be given another sight of the carrot. Contact was therefore made, not with Ribbentrop, who was believed to be an out-and-out war-monger, but with Göring.

A bait for Göring

The bait held out was participation in a grandiose scheme for joint Anglo-German exploitation of the wealth and markets of Africa and other under-developed areas of the world. Behind this offer lay the notion that the world was divided into 'have' and 'have-not' powers, and that it was this division, with Germany among the latter, which was threatening peace—a naive misconstruction of Nazi ideas which had found wide acceptance in the world in the late 1930's. News of the talks held in London between Dr Wohltat (Göring's representative), Sir Horace Wilson, head of the Treasury and Chamberlain's personal adviser, and Mr Hudson, President of the Board of Trade, leaked out at the end of July and led to bitter attacks on the British government both at home and in the German and Italian press.

This, then, was the situation in the last week of July, when the German plans for



△In the inflamed sector of Tientsin, White Russian soldiers and Chinese demonstrated against Great Britain — 'enemy of the new Asian order'



△Danzig was the real powder-keg, and during the last few months before war broke out Germany laid down a heavy barrage of propaganda: this funeral was for two German soldiers said to have been shot by the Poles on the Danzig frontier

◁ The result of their discussions was announced on August 23, 1939, when an amazed world learned that Russia and Germany, sworn enemies, had signed a ten-year non-aggression pact. Molotov signs while Ribbentrop and Stalin watch

Ullstein

attack on Poland began to mature. Britain was still chasing the will-o'-the-wisp of agreement with the Soviets. On July 27 the dispatch of an Anglo-French military mission to Moscow was announced. The diplomatic front against Italy was in reasonable shape; that against Germany still consisted only of the British and French guarantees to Poland—an increasingly bellicose and determined Poland—while the Soviet Union was still holding out for an offer from Germany. Appeasement of Germany therefore depended on the faint hope of unofficial contacts with Göring.

Germany had still failed to bring off the negotiations for an alliance with Japan. The Italian government still believed that it had assurances from Germany that 1939 would pass without war with the West; the Balkans were in disarray, with Hungary and Bulgaria on the German side, and Yugoslavia leaning towards her. In the Far East Japan was further embroiled in China and was being subjected to increasing economic pressure from America, where President Roosevelt was beginning, gingerly, to flex America's muscles.

In the military field, Anglo-French cooperation was now well advanced, and while Britain was beginning to overtake Germany in the field of war production, France was doing her best, with Roosevelt's aid, to buy modern aircraft from America. Germany's war plans were nearly mature. By this time Hitler needed only to detach the Soviet Union from the West and to provide himself with an excuse for an attack on Poland. He remained convinced that once the British and French saw their hopes of Russian support collapse, they would in turn abandon their support of Poland.

AUGUST: SOVIET SHOCK

The preliminary German approaches to the Soviets, to see if their constant hints of the possibility of an agreement were seriously intended, were made at the end of July, and turned out to be quite satisfactory. On August 3 Ribbentrop followed them up by dropping what he called a gentle hint as to the possibility of an understanding on the fate of Poland, and again there was a positive reaction from the Soviet side.

With that assurance, Hitler proceeded to the next stage—the fabrication of an excuse for war. At the end of July the Danzig Senate, on Hitler's orders, dispatched a deliberately provocative note to the Polish authorities on the customs inspector dispute, threatening reprisals against Polish officials. The Polish reaction was quite as violent as the German authorities could have wished: on August 4 the Polish government told the Danzig Senate that any physical action against the Polish customs officials in Danzig would be regarded as an act of violence against officials of the Polish state.

Hitler now had his excuse for action against Poland, an excuse made more plausible by the violent reaction of the Polish press to the threats made by the Danzig Senate. He summoned the Nazi Gauleiter of Danzig to Berchtesgaden, and gave him instructions on when and how to step up the pressure on Poland, so that a Polish military action against Danzig would

be provoked at the right time for German military preparations, which were then set for any date after August 24.

On August 9 the Polish ambassador in Berlin received a German note protesting Polish intervention in the internal affairs of Danzig. 'Any repetition,' it said, 'would lead to an aggravation of German-Polish relations for which the Poles would be directly responsible.' The following day came the Polish reply; again it was violent and uncompromising. The Poles were determined not to be bullied like the Czechs; and they genuinely believed that they could defeat Germany. Any German intervention in Poland's dispute with Danzig, so ran the reply, would be regarded as an act of aggression. Hitler could now proceed to the next phase of his plan—the isolation of Poland.

At this point, however, things began again to go a little wrong. Since the signing of the Pact of Steel the Italians had been mainly concerned with trying—with rather less success than the Germans—to disrupt the British front in the Balkans and the Mediterranean. Mussolini and his Foreign Minister, Count Ciano, still believed that they had Hitler's promise that no general war should be provoked against the West before 1942; but as August opened, Count Ciano suddenly realised where German policy was going. On the news of the Polish note he descended on Berchtesgaden in an agony of apprehension, where he was met with what he took to be arrogance and deceit. Ribbentrop and Hitler both lectured him for hours; his warnings, that this time Britain was not going to stand aside, were hardly even listened to. He returned to Rome furious with German treachery, convinced that Italy in her own interests must stand aside.

His visit left little impression on Hitler's mind. On August 14 Hitler harangued selected military leaders on the timidity of Britain and France, and that same day the German ambassador in Moscow saw Molotov and proposed that Ribbentrop should come to Moscow to settle matters between them. Molotov replied by proposing a non-aggression pact.

Slow boat to Moscow

In the meantime the Anglo-French military mission was proceeding slowly (by sea, as the French refused to fly and the British to travel by train through Germany) to Moscow. At its first meeting with the Soviet military authorities, on August 12, the mission was confronted at once with three embarrassing questions. Did its members have authority to conclude a military agreement? How did the Western powers propose to react to German aggression against Poland? How did the Western powers envisage the Russians coming to the aid of Poland and Rumania?

Some elements in Russia may have still hoped that the Western replies would show they meant business, and there may even have been some who still thought the Western allies could be brought to force the Poles and the Rumanians to admit Soviet forces *before* war broke out. Others, probably taking the Western answer to this question as the touchstone by which to judge British and French resolution to defend Poland and stand up to Hitler, seem to have

agreed with Hitler that resolution was lacking, that Britain and France were bluffing, and that at the last moment they would desert Poland, or else negotiate another Munich-style settlement at her expense.

Again, the Soviet leadership may have simply taken the inability of the West to force a way for them into Poland as confirmation of what they knew already—that to conclude an alliance with the West meant at best a European settlement for which the credit would go to Britain, at worst an unrewarding war with Germany. Only the Germans offered the chance of a major Soviet advance to the shores of the Baltic and into east central Europe.

Hitler prepares a coup

Hitler certainly thought he detected signs of British unwillingness to back Poland to the bitter end. He devoted himself therefore to preparing everything for the diplomatic *coup* which, in his view, would enable the British to withdraw their guarantee to Poland. On August 15 the Japanese were reported to be still at odds over allying themselves with Germany. The crisis over Tientsin—which had looked at one moment as if it would lead the Japanese into a conflict with Britain sufficient to drive Japan to ally herself with Germany—was fizzling out. Still worse, the Japanese army in northern China, always the most violent and ultranationalist, had embroiled itself with the Soviet army at Nomonhan on the borders of Outer Mongolia. In a series of engagements in which several divisions were committed on each side, and which reached their climax in mid-August, the Japanese were defeated with severe losses. The Japanese army's credit sank to an all-time low.

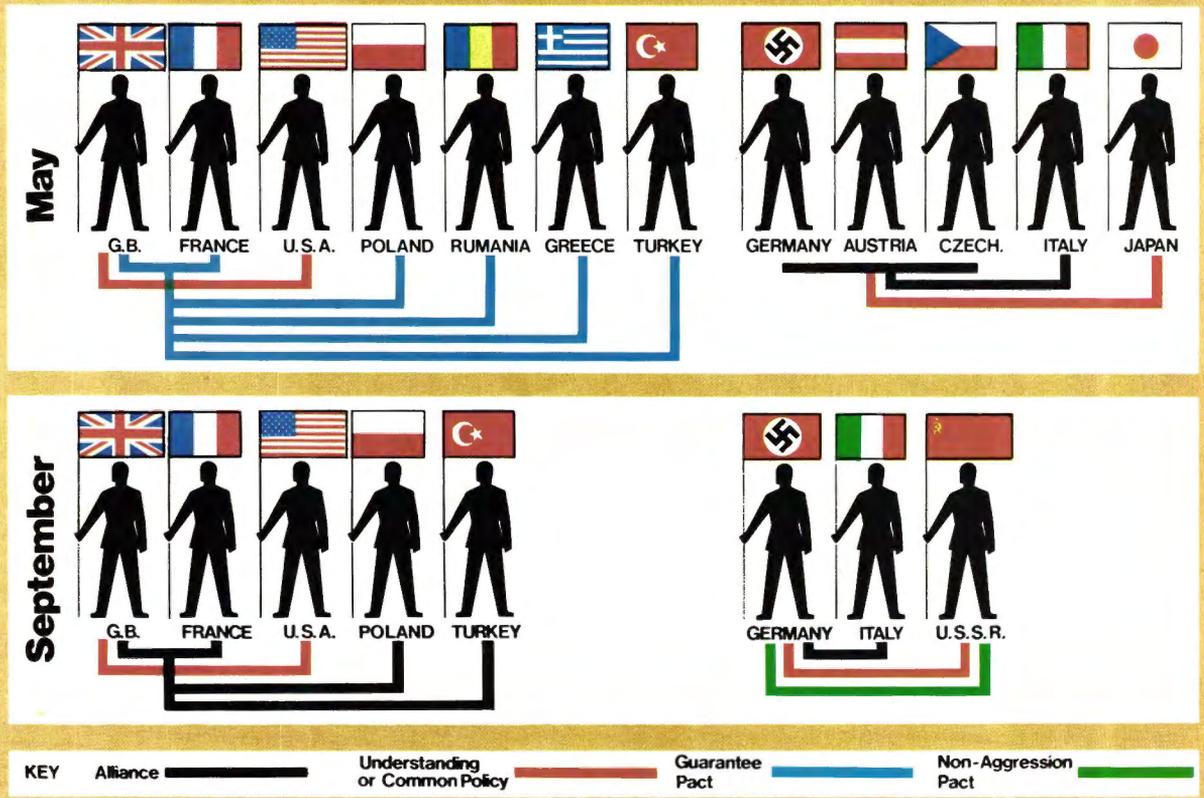
The bombshell

Hitler had, in fact, already turned to Russia. In a series of messages he beat down Russian procrastination and secured Stalin's permission for Ribbentrop to visit Moscow. The news of his visit burst on a startled world late in the evening of August 21. The Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact was signed in the evening of August 23, together with a secret protocol putting all the Baltic states (except Lithuania), the eastern half of Poland, and the Rumanian province of Bessarabia into the Soviet sphere of influence. The rest of eastern Europe went to Germany.

In the meantime Hitler had already given the order for Danzig to provoke a break with Poland over the customs inspectors' dispute; and he set 4.30 am on August 26 as zero hour for the German attack on Poland. On August 22 he addressed his generals. Britain, he said, was so tied down in the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and the Far East, that it was most unlikely that she would intervene. The pact with Russia had struck the last weapon from her hands. The men he met at Munich would never go to war over Poland, and his only anxiety was that some state might again try to mediate. Poland must be brutally, pitilessly crushed. The next few days were to prove his judgement of Britain and France completely at fault.

The crucial day was August 25, the day on which Hitler had to confirm the order to attack, and at 3 pm that day his order was given. Then came two disasters in rapid succession: at 4.30 pm Hitler heard that the

Europe's Changing Alliances May/September 1939



alliance between Britain and Poland which embodied formally the guarantee of March 31 had been signed in London. (So Britain was not going to stand aside after all.) And at 6 pm Mussolini, torn between his own feeling of loyalty to Hitler and Ciano's fury at Ribbentrop's double-dealing, told Hitler that Italy could not support Germany without German supplies on a scale which Ciano made sure was well beyond Germany's capacity to fulfil.

A military observer described Hitler as 'considerably shaken' by Mussolini's defection, and at 7.30 pm the order to attack was withdrawn: the German invasion forces had tamely to return to their barracks. As it happened, Japan broke off the alliance negotiations with Germany on the same day, and three days later a new cabinet took over in that country. Hitler's hopes of Britain being distracted by anxieties in the Far East disappeared. The Nazi-Soviet pact had backfired.

The cancellation of the order to attack Poland put Britain and France momentarily in a very strong position. It was, however, one that proved impossible to exploit, since Hitler soon recovered his initiative, and the British government could only proceed on the assumption that the German-Polish conflict was a genuine one which would yield to mediation, and not a trumped-up, stage-managed excuse for war.

Their apparent willingness to mediate, and the increasing evidence of divided purpose in France, gave Hitler heart for a new plan - to lure the Poles into negotiations which could then be broken off in such a way as to put all the blame on the Poles, and to give the British government every conceivable excuse thereafter for backing

down. These proposals were put to the British through a neutral intermediary named Birger Dahlerus, a Swedish businessman who lived in Britain and was related to Göring.

SEPTEMBER: THE BLITZKRIEG BREAKS

Meanwhile, the German armed forces were commanded to be ready for attack by September 1. The final order was given on August 31. The attack on Poland was begun at 4.45 am the next day.

The German attack on Poland ended any hope of peace with Britain; but the French were still clutching at the hope of evading war, and they persuaded Mussolini to propose a new four-power conference. All through September 1 and the following day, while German bombs were falling on Poland and the Panzers were rolling into action against the Polish cavalry, the British were doing their utmost to get the French into line. Unaware of this back-stage manoeuvring, opinion in the British Parliament and in the country was reaching boiling point. On the afternoon of September 2 the House of Commons, suspicious that a new Munich was under preparation, broke into open revolt, and the Cabinet followed them.

An ultimatum

At 10.30 that evening its members descended *en masse* on Neville Chamberlain as he dined with Halifax, Sir Horace Wilson, and the head of the Foreign Office, Sir Alexander Cadogan. The meeting was brief and accompanied by tremendous peals of thunder. Chamberlain was left no option but to abandon the attempt to get France into line, and leave her only to follow. As

the meeting broke up, a telegram was sent to Sir Nevile Henderson in Berlin instructing him to deliver an ultimatum to Hitler at 9 am the following morning. If German troops did not end all aggressive action against Poland and begin to withdraw from Polish territory by 11 am that day, September 3, then Britain and Germany would be at war. At 9 am on September 3, Henderson arrived at the German Foreign Ministry, but Ribbentrop refused to see him and he was received instead by the Foreign Ministry interpreter, Dr Schmidt. After Henderson left, Schmidt hurried over to Hitler's headquarters; while he translated the British ultimatum the Führer sat 'like one turned to stone'. Finally he turned to Ribbentrop with an angry 'What now?'. As Schmidt left the room to break the news to the crowd of ministers and high-ranking Nazis that thronged the antechamber, Göring turned to him. 'If we lose this war,' he said, 'may heaven be merciful to us.'

Two hours later, as church bells rang in Britain for morning service, the British ultimatum expired. Britain and Germany were at war. The Second World War had begun.



Central Press

A typical application of the Blitzkrieg technique

Phase 1



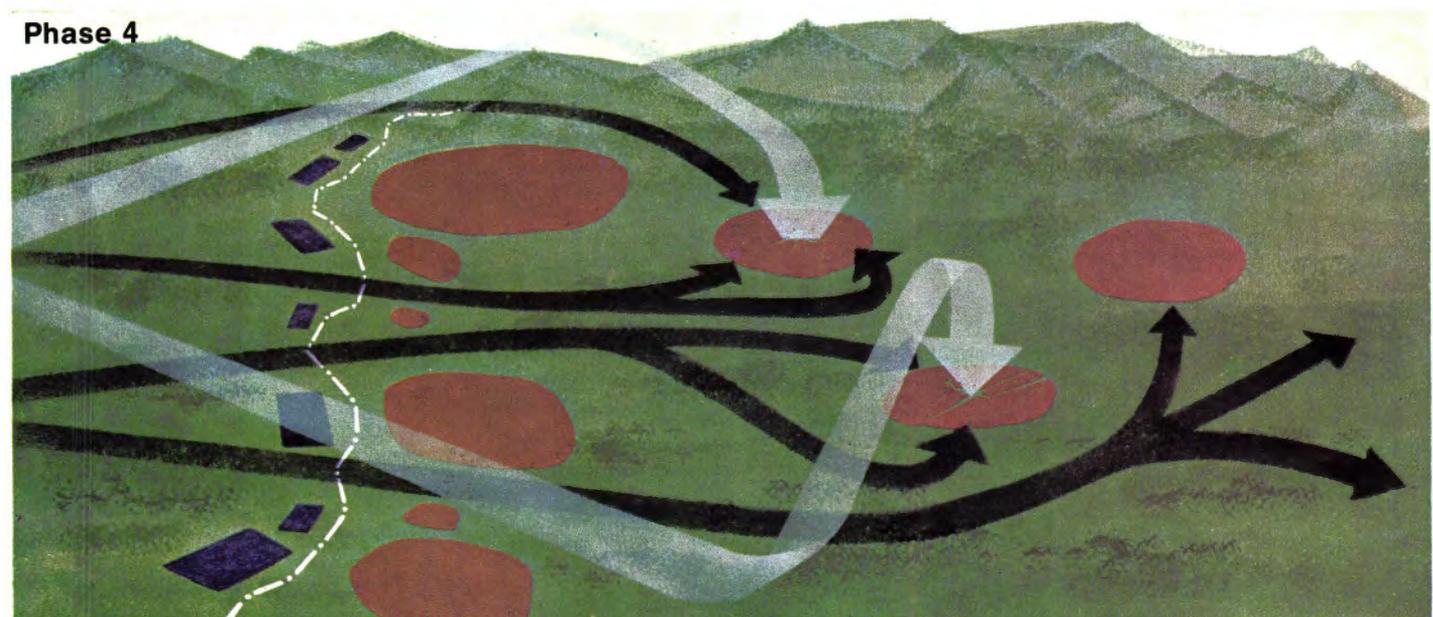
Phase 2



Phase 3



Phase 4



Blitzkrieg!

Poland September 1/October 6, 1939

Barrie Pitt

The *Blitzkrieg*, with its tactics of speed and shock, was a fresh approach to war, and the overwhelming success of its debut in the Polish campaign surprised not only the Poles but the Germans themselves. Never before had a nation's military capacity been so utterly annihilated in so short a time, with so few losses to the victor

'Blood is the price of victory,' wrote the German military theorist Clausewitz. 'Philanthropists may easily imagine that there is a skilful method of disarming and overcoming the enemy without great bloodshed, and that this is the proper tendency of the Art of War. . . . That is an error which must be extirpated.'

His dictum was seized upon so avidly by the political and military leaders of the world that mankind had to pour out rivers of blood, and to wait over a hundred years, for a practical demonstration of the falsity of Clausewitz's conclusions which might relieve them of the philosophical necessity to try to win their wars by nothing less than the physical obliteration of their enemy's armies. As late as 1917, the British were still attempting to break the German forces opposite them by the simple application of the principle of attrition—using up three British lives to neutralise two Germans, and relying on a numerical superiority of thir-

teen to eight to leave a British residue when there were no Germans left. This was attrition at its most brutal, and the degree of success it achieved is still a matter of argument.

Military technique

Twenty-three years later, Germany completely destroyed Poland, whose total armed forces exceeded 3,000,000 men, at a cost of less than 10,000 fatal casualties—and did so in so effective a manner that even now it can hardly be claimed that the defeated nation has as yet regained her former status. The explanation of the astonishing difference in military efficiency which this comparison indicates lies in the enormous development in military technique which occurred between 1918 and 1940.

This development was largely the result of the studies and activities of a small group of military thinkers in England, led by Captain B. H. Liddell Hart, who depicted the

action of their theories in terms of the play of lightning. Ironically, it was their country's chief military antagonist, Germany, who translated their theories into action—and called the result '*Blitzkrieg*'.

An army is composed of men, and has in itself many of the attributes and requirements of a human being. It needs food and drink to keep alive, tools in the shape of weapons to carry out its work, and a constant flow of basic material—ammunition—to produce its finished product—an impotent enemy. Perhaps most important of all, it needs a brain in the shape of a High Command, and a nervous system in the shape of a communications and control network.

The basic principle behind the *Blitzkrieg* technique is that it is simpler, easier, and cheaper to reduce the strength of an enemy army by starvation (cutting off its supplies) or by paralysis (destroying its High Command or cutting its communication and control lines) than by battering it to

Phase 1 Holding infantry keep defenders occupied along whole length of front, and lay smoke-screen to blind them and to conceal mass of attacking armour. Dive-bombers act as long-range artillery to isolate the battleground, cutting off defenders' reserves and silencing defending guns. Armoured spearhead with sappers and shock troops advances to first obstacle—here, a river. Under cover of smoke, artillery, and dive-bombers concentrated at the planned bridgehead, shock troops cross river in rubber boats while sappers erect pontoon bridges. Paratroops may be dropped to disrupt rear areas

Phase 2 Assault troops and demolition squads destroy defending strongpoints where possible and widen bridgehead, as armour crosses river and then moves up through them. Motorised infantry and artillery follow armour, clear up remaining opposition, and hold the flanks. Dive-bombers clear area in advance of armour and keep up attack on communications and reserves
Phase 3 Armoured spearhead has broken through defences, fans out, and by-passes defensive strongpoints. Some engage the enemy rear till motorised infantry comes up; main armour sweeps around key road and rail junctions, paralysing supply, reserve, and

command units. Main infantry crosses river when defenders are demoralised by the chaos behind them. (Every attempt must be made to capture or encircle defenders, not to drive them back.)
Phase 4 The first three phases have been carried out at intervals along the whole front: spearheads now plunge deep into enemy territory towards key towns and cities; motorised infantry follows to maintain communications and reduce strongpoints; marching infantry moves in to collect prisoners, surround defending pockets, etc. Second-line infantry moves up to original front, carries out administrative and supply tasks for the forward units

Blitzkrieg: chaos inside the trap

a bloody pulp. It is a recognition of the fact that the judo expert can often defeat a far bigger and more powerful opponent by speed, agility, and efficiency; and above all by attacking him when and where he least expects it. The campaign in Poland was the first practical demonstration of this technique in modern times—in times, that is, since the development of armoured vehicles reintroduced the possibility of movement on a field of battle dominated before by the rifle, the machine-gun, and accurate, long-range artillery.

Vulnerable frontiers

Poland was well suited to such a method of warfare, for in addition to being fairly flat (and at the time of the German invasion, dry and hard-surfaced) her frontiers were much too long for every mile of them to be defended. She was, moreover, flanked by her enemy on both sides—in East Prussia to the north and in the recently occupied provinces of Czechoslovakia to the south—and as it happened, the most valuable areas of the country lay within those flanks. Poland, in fact, protruded like a tongue into hostile territory, and unfortunately it was considered politically necessary for her armies to be deployed in that tongue in order to safeguard the country's prestige and morale despite the military wisdom of deploying them instead behind defences along the wide river-lines of the Vistula and the San.

But Poland's most fatal weakness was in the quality of her armed forces. Though her soldiers were hardy, and brave to a degree which elicited the highest admiration of her enemies, they were in great majority slow-moving, foot-marching infantry; alongside 30 Polish infantry divisions there were only two motorised *brigades* and eleven cavalry *brigades*—and horses are as vulnerable to bullets as any other flesh and blood.

Against this force, spread in defensive positions along that enormous frontier, were to be launched six armoured *divisions*, four light *divisions* consisting of motorised infantry accompanied by armoured units, and four motorised *divisions*—plus 27 infantry divisions whose main role would be to hold the attention of the Polish infantry while the mobile forces raced around the flanks and struck at the vital rear centres of control and supply.

Systematic destruction

But even before the armoured columns had broken through any defensive crust which might impede their progress, the attack on the nerve centres would begin. At 0445 hours on September 1, 1939, bombers and fighters of the German Luftwaffe crossed the frontier and began their systematic destruction of Polish airfields and aircraft, of road and rail centres, of concentrations of troop reserves, and of anything which intelligence or observation indicated as likely to house command headquarters of any status. Within two days they had established German air superiority over Poland, and could then revert to the more purely tactical role of concentrated bombing immediately ahead of the probing tank columns.

These had followed the Luftwaffe across the frontier one hour later. The main German concentration had been along the

southern quarter of the original German-Polish frontier, and at the western end of the old Czechoslovak-Polish frontier. Here had lain Army Group South under General von Rundstedt, comprising from north to south the VIII Army under General Blaskowitz, the X Army under General von Reichenau and the XIV under General List. On the left wing, the VIII Army was to break through between two Polish armies (the Poznan and the Lodz), isolate the Poznan Army in the west, and guard Reichenau's left flank; on the right wing, List's army would break through towards Krakow and then swing east to isolate the Polish Carpathian Army against the mountains.

In the centre, Reichenau's X Army, with the bulk of the German armoured forces, would engage the Lodz Army with infantry while the armour raced around the southern flank, turned north and made contact with Blaskowitz's forces, and then advanced with them on Warsaw. Thus would the main Polish armies be first isolated from each other and their own supplies, and then cut up piecemeal.

In the meantime, Army Group North would have struck—the IV Army eastwards from Pomerania across the Polish corridor into East Prussia where it would join forces with III Army and then strike south, east of Warsaw and the Vistula, eventually to join forces with List's armour coming up from the south. Thus two vast encircling movements would be carried out, and any Polish forces which managed to escape the trap west of the Vistula would be caught in the outer trap.

Even Germans confused

It is rare that military plans can be carried out as exactly as was the German plan for the invasion of Poland. By September 4, Reichenau's spearheads were 50 miles into Poland, and two days later they were past Lodz and the whole of the Polish army based on that town was thus isolated. To the south, List's armour had crossed the Dunajec, the Biala, and the Wisloka in turn and then swept on to reach the San on each side of Przemysl, thus opening the way to the city of Lwow and also outflanking the San defences. They then turned north to meet the armoured spearhead of Army Group North, commanded by General Guderian, already across the Narew and storming southwards towards Brest Litovsk over 100 miles behind the battlefield.

At the end of the first week of the invasion, therefore, the confusion in Poland

was so great that even the instigators of the confusion were baffled. From the German point of view, their inner pincers had met successfully, but the chaos inside the trap was such that they could make little of it. Polish columns marched and counter-marched in their frantic efforts to make contact either with the enemy or their own support, and in doing so raised such clouds of dust that aerial observations could report nothing but general movement by unidentified forces of unknown strength, engaged in unrecognisable activity in pursuit of incomprehensible ends.

A bitter battle

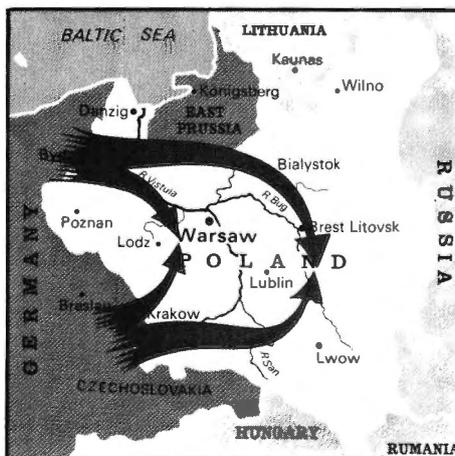
There was thus some argument at German Supreme Headquarters as to whether the bulk of the Polish forces had managed to escape across the Vistula or not. In the event, Rundstedt's view that they had not—in which he was correct—prevailed, and Reichenau's army was as a result wheeled north to form a block along the Bzura, west of Warsaw. Here was fought one of the most bitter battles of the campaign, but one for which there could be only one end. Despite the desperate bravery of the Poles, the odds were too great for them, for they were fighting in reverse, they were cut off from their supplies and bases, and they were coming into action in sections instead of together, against an enemy who had only to hold his position to win. And after the first day of the Bzura battle they were being harried from behind by troops under Blaskowitz along their southern flank, and part of the German IV Army which had swung south-east before actually reaching East Prussia, along their northern flank. The Poles were thus cut off from even the divisional control and supply organisations which had originally accompanied them into their deployment areas. It is hardly surprising that only a very small number managed to break through Reichenau's screen (at night) and join up with the garrison in Warsaw.

The trap closes

The Battle of the Bzura sealed the inner ring in which the Polish armies of the centre were trapped; and the trap itself was formed of armour and sprung by speed—the two essentials of the *Blitzkrieg*. Reichenau's spearhead had reached the outskirts of Warsaw in eight days, having travelled 140 miles in that time, always along the line of least resistance and least expectation—and there it halted and formed a solid bar against which the Poles hammered in vain for another week, while 100 miles to the east the two prongs of the outer trap met as Guderian's armoured corps from the north made contact with Kleist's armour coming up from the south.

From this double encirclement only a small fraction of the Polish army could hope to escape—and this hope faded when, on September 17, the Russian army moved in from the east to take her share of the spoils which had been agreed between the two dictatorships the previous month. Poland ceased to exist and a new international frontier now ran from East Prussia, past Bialystok, Brest Litovsk, and Lwow, to the Carpathians.

There had been extended common frontiers between Russia and Germany before, and rarely had they proved anything but sources of constant friction and animosity. In October 1939 a sense of history prompted many to wonder how long such bellicose neighbours could live in harmony.



The inner and outer pincers

TWO SIDES OF THE POLISH CAMPAIGN

General Walther K. Nehring and Colonel Adam Sawczynski

Here are parallel accounts of the Polish campaign—two views, the German and the Polish, of the action that inaugurated the Second World War. Such a parallel presentation has an obvious advantage: it offers a wholly new outlook on the campaign by presenting, side by

side, the events as seen by both victor and vanquished alike. It also presents at length the Polish viewpoint, which is often played down or virtually ignored. The German account is given by General Nehring, and few men are better qualified to do so. As Chief-of-Staff to

Guderian he was in the centre of the planning and execution of the new and decisive *Blitzkrieg* technique. Colonel Sawczynski also played an important role in the campaign, commanding the artillery of the 41st Infantry Division



GENERAL WALTHER K. NEHRING was an infantry officer during the First World War. In 1928 he began his collaboration with the then Major Heinz Guderian, and in 1929 he assumed command of the first motor-cycle

infantry company—the beginning of the motorised German army. In 1939 he rejoined Guderian as Chief-of-Staff to his Panzer Corps, which fought in Poland and France. In 1942 he served under Rommel in North Africa as Commanding General of the German Afrika Korps. At the end of the war he was Commander-in-Chief of the I Panzer Army in the East. General Nehring has written countless books, essays, and reports on the role of mechanised armour; since the war, he has contributed to numerous military/historical projects.



COLONEL A. T. SAWCZYNSKI studied history and law at the University of Lwow, Poland, from 1910 to 1914. During the First World War he was an artillery officer in the Austro-Hungarian army, and in 1918 he joined the

Polish army (then in France). He was lecturer at the Staff College in Warsaw in 1934-35 and Commandant of the Artillery Officers School from 1936 to 1939. At the outbreak of war Colonel Sawczynski was Commanding Officer, Artillery, of the 41st Infantry Division; he was captured during the Polish campaign and until 1945 was a prisoner of war in Germany. After the war, he joined the Historical Section of the Polish General Staff and, later, the General Sikorski Historical Institute in London. He is the author of *Polish Forces in the Second World War*.

HISTORY OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

supplement



AN INTRODUCTION TO THE MOST DRAMATIC STORY OF OUR TIMES

PRELUDE TO DISASTER

Europe 1919/1938: *J. H. Huizinga*

There are few more heartbreaking tales in history than that of the inter-war period—the 1920's and the 1930's. It had begun with such great hopes. When at last the fearful bloodletting of 1914-18, with its 10,000,000 dead and 20,000,000 wounded, was over, there seemed good reason to believe that the First World War would indeed prove to have been the 'war to end war'. The Allies that had finally succeeded in destroying Germany's formidable war machine had then imposed conditions on her in the peace treaty at Versailles, conditions designed expressly to make it impossible for the world again to be disturbed by German militarism. Germany's army was to be reduced to 100,000 men and her navy to 15,000, she was forbidden armour or air force, and there were safeguards to ensure that she was not able to build up a hidden military reserve.

Moreover, the dawn after the long, long night of war seemed full of promise in 1920, not only because of calculations of relative power, but even more because of the widespread feeling that man had at last learned his lesson. After that four years of mass slaughter and destruction, the world had realised that the jungle of armed sovereign states, divided by wide divergencies of outlook and by mutual ignorance, had become altogether too dangerous.

This recognition led to the first serious attempt to replace the system of international anarchy by an embryonic legal order, with the incorporation into the Treaty of Versailles of the Charter of the League of Nations. Henceforward, the potential aggressor would be deterred by the knowledge that in disturbing the peace he would face the combined might of all those who, in signing the Covenant of the League, had sworn to uphold the established order. An attack on one member of the League would be regarded as an attack on all, and collective security would at last deliver the

nations from their immemorial bondage to fear.

Europe relaxed—and it was in a hopeful mood that the chastened populations (if not some of their more sophisticated and sceptical leaders) faced the future. They were soon to find it difficult, however, to live with a Germany still struggling under the dire effects of the vengeance wreaked upon her.

As the passions of war receded, therefore, the determination to keep the vanquished in the strait-jacket of Versailles gave way (though more in Britain than in France) to the desire to reintegrate them into the European comity of nations, to secure their willing acceptance of what nowadays would be called peaceful coexistence. And reason reinforced the promptings of the heart wrung by the spectacle of the former enemy's sufferings.

In 1923, France had felt obliged to occupy the Ruhr as a result of Germany's failure to pay the reparations demanded under the Treaty of Versailles—but the result had been of no benefit to France and had bankrupted millions of middle-class Germans, who might otherwise have formed a stabilising element in the country, by precipitating a quite fantastic inflation. This financial morass in the heart of Europe so obviously threatened the foundations of markets in the neighbourhood—and indeed throughout the whole world—that emergency underpinning had to be carried out. American loans eventually saved the German economy, but it had become quite evident to all, including the French, that the cheapest way to live with Germany was to allow her to support herself.

Thus financial reality supported the dictates of pity, and on October 24, 1925, the delegates of Britain, France, Belgium, Italy, and Germany assembled at Locarno to bring about the changes in Germany's status

The History of the Second World War is a comprehensive, authoritative and immensely readable account of the six most tumultuous years of modern times. For month after month a team of authors including Germans, Russians, Americans, Japanese, French and Italians as well as British, worked under the leadership of the late Sir Basil Liddell Hart, one of the world's most distinguished military experts, and of Barrie Pitt, who was Historical Consultant to the BBC's series, *The Great War*.

The result is a vivid and objective history, illustrated by more than 3000 maps, diagrams and photographs—many in colour—which provides a unique and revealing work of historic reference. There are first-hand accounts which cut across national boundaries of major campaigns; for example in this first issue the blitzkrieg invasion of Poland is described both by Panzer General Walther Nehring and Poland's Colonel Sawczynski. In this way the reader is given fascinating and instructive insights, military and political, as the course of the war is unravelled step by step.

It is this combination of scholarship and readability which will appeal both to the serious student of history and the general reader who wishes either to gain a greater understanding of events in which he was himself caught up or which had been relegated already to legend when he was born.

That is why this *History of the Second World War*, building week by week into six volumes of 96 parts, is a work for readers of all ages and all interests by a team of many nationalities.

This special supplement, which should be studied *before* the first issue proper, provides the reader with a background of events leading up to the outbreak of the war itself.

Your order form for the special binder is in the centre pages of this supplement.

continued page x

THE CLIMATE OF APPEASEMENT

Britain 1935/1939: *Barrie Pitt*

Never had the English Channel seemed so wide as during the years before Munich. Lulled into complacency by their politicians and comforted by a gentle wave of prosperity, the British people found it easy to ignore the turbulent events in central Europe. Only after Munich, and even then reluctantly, did they begin to realise that their nation's honour had been on trial while they were sleeping

It is apparently part and parcel of the elasticity of human nature to feel warmer towards one who has just received defeat than to the ally who helped administer that defeat – and after the First World War we British in particular quickly forgot the wrongs we had suffered at German hands, remembering instead the more recent sufferings Germany had undergone as a result of the conditions of the Treaty of Versailles – not that many people knew a great deal about the disputed conditions, other than the fact that many eloquent voices condemned them. There was a widespread feeling in Britain that Germany had atoned for whatever wrongs she had committed, and that it was time she was allowed to achieve that ‘place in the sun’ which she had been demanding for many years.

This feeling of warmth was also compounded with a sensation of kinship with the Germans, based vaguely on the belief that the typical Englishman and German were both blond and blue-eyed, and that we shared some curious Saxon ancestry. Apparently the element of Norman blood in English veins counted for nothing.

In the middle 1930's, therefore, the British people as a whole looked upon the German nation with considerable favour. The leader of the nation, Herr Hitler – as he was referred to in those days – seemed rather an odd choice for the German people to make . . . but at least they seemed to be pleased with him and there was no denying the fact that he was giving to a large part of Europe some sort of form and order which had been sadly lacking before. The French governments shuttled in and out of office with seemingly random inconsequence, but Herr Hitler's National Socialists – the Nazis – appeared likely to remain in office for some time; and if at times their reported behaviour raised doubts as to their humanity – well, even Germans were Continentals and thus not British; the reports were probably exaggerated, too.

Moreover, the British did not want to face another period of trouble and exhaustion. Between 1914 and 1918, they had surely poured out enough of their blood and energy to satisfy the gods of war for some time; and that financial depression which had flung over a million unemployed on to the labour market was only just over. We wanted peace and quiet and as long a time as possible of enjoyment of our rising standard of living – for the standard was rising at this time, slowly but steadily . . . and noticeably.

It is not surprising that in these circumstances Britain's political leaders felt that

they should keep the country out of war and do everything they could to ensure peace, thus prolonging the period of euphoria. Like the dull majority upon whom they depended for their votes, they too reflected the mood of amiability towards the German race and the desire to keep out of trouble. Mr Baldwin and his pipe, and Mr Chamberlain with his umbrella, may appear now as figures of inadequacy – but when they were in power, pipe and umbrella were symbols of steadiness, respectability, and security.

Then in March 1936, Hitler's forces re-occupied the Rhineland. Although the British people stirred restively under the verbal goads applied by the few percipient members of the community who sensed the potential danger, they were more than ready to accept Lord Lothian's assurance that Hitler was doing nothing more than taking over ‘his own back-garden’ – for Lord Lothian was surrounded by that shadowy but knowledgeable set polarised at All Souls and the offices of *The Times* which, so rumour had it, virtually ran the country in its own best interests. This the country was perfectly prepared to allow them to do – so long as the sun shone and living standards gently rose.

‘Herr Hitler seemed a rather odd choice’

Moreover, Lord Lothian, as Philip Kerr, had helped considerably in the preparatory work for the Versailles Treaty and was thus presumably an expert on it: and if *he* agreed with the Germans that the treaty was grossly unfair, then who was there to argue with him? Sir Robert Vansittart (who was at this time beginning his long and honourable fight to open the eyes of the British people to the dangers facing them) was therefore ignored, for few were prepared to listen to a man proposing – perhaps too vehemently – an uncomfortable and possibly even dangerous course of action. At that time we wanted neither discomfort nor danger.

In July 1936 the Spanish Civil War broke out and very soon this had rather more impact on the British people than events in central Europe. Quite a number of Englishmen joined the International Brigade and actually went out to fight in the war, and soon parts of southern England were invaded by a horde of dark-eyed, rather hysterical children, brought over in their misery by the International Red Cross and looked after at first in tented camps. It was fortunate that the summer of 1937 was fine, for

the organisation to care for the children was not good. On one sultry evening there was a sudden thunderstorm of the type which often occurs in Hampshire. The first violent crash overhead startled even us who were used to such things; on the Spanish children the effect was that of a major cataclysm – and they were still being found days afterwards, huddling in barns all over the country to which they had fled in terror from the imagined bombardment.

We adopted at first an attitude of tolerance towards this exhibition of Latin temperament – and anyway, they were only children (though British children, of course, wouldn't behave like that) – but we were still rather puzzled. When reports came in of the destruction of Guernica by the German Condor Squadron, we got our first intimation of the horrors of modern warfare, and with this some of our bewilderment vanished, to be replaced by odd twinges of fear. Perhaps, after all, British children could be reduced to panic by a thunderclap – and the realisation came to many that a war in Europe could kill us, too.

When Hitler went into Austria in March 1938, there was, therefore, considerable emotional pressure on the British people to accept their leaders' assurances that no great danger loomed as a result, and the general public soothed away their fears with a combination of inaccuracy and self-deception.

But the time was now fast approaching when even the English could no longer close their eyes and ears to events across the North Sea.

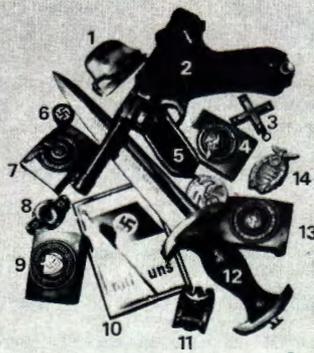
‘To English ears,’ announced Mr Churchill to Parliament on the day after German troops had moved into Austria, ‘the name of Czechoslovakia sounds outlandish. No doubt they are only a small democratic State, no doubt they have an army only two or three times as large as ours, no doubt they have a munitions supply only three times that of Italy, but they are still a virile people, they still have their rights . . . they have a line of fortresses, and they have a strongly-manifested will to live, a will to live freely.’

This blast from the ‘*enfant terrible*’ of British politics so uneased me that I endeavoured hastily to patch the gaping fabric of my own political and geographical knowledge. The result was valuable, but so disturbing that I almost wished that I hadn't taken the trouble.

In 1918, Czechoslovakia had been hacked out of the northern provinces of the old Austro-Hungarian Empire, and it was very



Emblems and Equipment of the Nazis and their supporters



- 1: First World War ex-serviceman's badge ('My Service').
- 2: Parablellum pistol.
- 3: Baltic Cross (semi-official decoration for Germans who fought against the Bolsheviks on the Baltic front).
- 4: Hitler Jugend belt buckle.
- 5: Blood Order (given to those who took part in the Munich Putsch of 1923).
- 6: Nazi Party badge.
- 7: Early SS belt buckle.
- 8: Mackensen commemorative clasp.
- 9: Labour Corps (period between Hitler Youth and military training) belt buckle.
- 10: Enamel plaque ('With us') fixed on houses, vehicles, etc. of party members.
- 11: Lapel button (semi-official, worn by Germans who fought against Poles in Silesia in 1923).
- 12: SS dagger ('My honour is faithfulness').
- 13: Dutch SS belt buckle.
- 14: Lapel button commemorating SA rally in 1931

THE CLIMATE OF APPEASEMENT

Another fatal compromise within the dictators ►

easy, for those who wished to do so, to persuade themselves that in 1938 Czechoslovakia was as ramshackle a political anachronism in Europe as Austro-Hungary had been at the turn of the century. This was not true. As a result of admirable development of the social and economic resources at their disposal, the Czechoslovak people had in a short time constructed a model democracy in which sovereignty was vested in the people and administered by an elected, two-house legislature. One of the results of this organisation and enterprise was a sound industrial and commercial structure which gave as its by-products medical, educational, and social insurance services which were the envy of Europe.

The core of the population was its 10,000,000 Czech and Slovak citizens—but at the western end of the country lived over 3,000,000 Germans who had had Czech nationality thrust on them when the boundaries were drawn, and at the eastern end there were 700,000 Magyars and 500,000 Ukrainians, and 60,000 Poles in the important industrial and mining area of Teschen.

A Country with an 'outlandish name'

Herein lay the danger to the state, for these minorities were a potential source of trouble—and Hitler required not only the clearance of his eastern borders in preparation for greater expansion towards the east, but also the elimination of any form of government which might, in the eyes of Europeans, appear preferable to his own.

In 1934, a 'German Home Front Party' had been formed among the German minority under the leadership of Konrad Henlein, and in 1935 changed its name to the 'Sudeten German Party'. Two years later, still under Henlein's leadership and blatantly encouraged and financed by Hitler, it was demanding the right to form an autonomous National Socialist state within the borders of Czechoslovakia itself—and independent of its laws. This request was now backed up by visible force, for the Austrian *Anschluss* ('annexation') had laid bare the whole southern flank of the Sudeten area to German attack (or support, depending on the viewpoint).

Mr Churchill was by no means the only person to foresee the next move in Hitler's programme. Two days after Hitler's occupation of Austria, Russian representatives approached the French government concerning their countries' mutual guarantees of Czechoslovakia's independence, whereby Russia would go to the Czechs' aid if France did so; and France was enquiring what Britain would do if France went to war. Russia stated she was willing to act; France was despondent about the situation but anxious—and so, in fact, Britain's attitude would be the determining factor.

We didn't want to go to war at all—certainly not for a country of whom all that most of us knew was that she had this 'outlandish name'—and it was with great relief that we read the soothing prognostications of our

leaders. These counselled caution and 'moderation', thus reflecting Mr Chamberlain's deep desire for peace (which we echoed) and also (a fact of which we were generally unaware) Lord Halifax's intense religiosity, which caused him to regard Russia as the Anti-Christ.

No action to support Czechoslovakia was therefore taken and Russia's approaches were rejected with a summary rudeness which was never used in dealings with Germany.

All through the summer of 1938, Dr Benes, President of Czechoslovakia, was the butt of Hitler's insults and threats, while Dr Goebbels' Propaganda Ministry poured out stories of atrocities committed by the Czechs against the Sudeten Germans. Regretfully, Mr Chamberlain came to the conclusion that the only hope for the preservation of peace in the world was the concession by Benes to every one of Hitler's demands, which at this stage was the granting of complete autonomy to the Sudetenland.

It was at about this time that the word 'appeasement' became more common in our vocabulary. We didn't feel then that there was anything wrong with it. 'Appeasement' has a gentle, conciliatory sound—like 'reasonable', 'well-meaning', 'agreeable'.

By early September, the Prime Minister had decided that the best way in which he could bring calm to a troubled scene was by a personal visit to Hitler, and with this in mind he arrived at Munich airport on the after-



BARRIE PITT, editor of the *History of the Second World War*, was born in 1918, the son of a naval officer. Educated in Portsmouth, he joined the army in 1939, serving in France and the Middle East. After demobilisation, he continued his military associations by joining the 21st Special Air Service Regiment (Artist Rifles), specialising as an instructor in close-quarter fighting. In 1953 he left London and took an appointment with the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment at Aldermaston. He began writing on military matters in 1954; in 1958 his first book, on the Zeebrugge Raid, was published, followed by a novel of behind-the-lines activities in North Africa in 1942. In 1960 his third book *Colonel and Falkland* appeared, and two years later the much-acclaimed *1918 – The Last Act*.

In June 1963 he was invited to become Chief Historical Consultant to the producer of the BBC film series *The Great War*, and resigned from the Atomic Energy Authority to do so. He is a contributor on naval war to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, has reviewed books on military subjects for newspapers in Britain and the U.S.A., and is currently editor of the paper-back series *Illustrated History of World War II* and *The Illustrated History of the Violent Century*.

noon of September 15, 1938, having travelled by air for the first time in his life. He was greeted by the news that while he had been in flight, Hitler had raised his demands from autonomy for Sudetenland to its complete

incorporation into the German Reich; and the only thing which Chamberlain learned during his interview with the Führer was that nothing less than this could be considered satisfactory. He did, however, also gain the impression that while Hitler was undoubtedly hard and ruthless, 'here was a man who could be relied upon when he had given his word'. He assured us of this when he returned and we were delighted to hear it.

Herr Hitler was a gentleman.

There then followed a conference in London with MM Daladier and Bonnet, France's Premier and Minister for Foreign Affairs, at which it was decided—not whether to accede to Hitler's demands, only the form

Flying to meet the Führer

in which it would be most effective to present those demands to the Czech government. Neither French nor British politicians favoured any form of a local plebiscite in the Sudetenland to ascertain exactly how deeply the desire of the inhabitants to join the Reich was rooted, but simply the outright cession of the area—which incidentally contained the line of defence fortifications upon which the whole of Czechoslovakia depended for protection against Germany. And at 2 am in the morning of September 21, the British and French Ministers in Prague called on President Benes to inform him that he should accept Hitler's demands, and that all areas in his country containing more than 50% of German inhabitants should be handed over 'before producing a situation for which France and Britain could take no responsibility'.

Thus did the great democracies protect their smaller brethren.

On September 22 Chamberlain again flew to meet the Führer, who this time graciously travelled some way to meet him in an hotel in Godesberg. Hitler listened to Chamberlain's announcement that Britain and France had recommended that all his demands should be met, courteously thanked him, and then said: *'Es tut mir furchtbar leid, aber das geht nicht mehr'* ('I'm very sorry, but I'm afraid this won't do, now').

He had, he informed Chamberlain, now received demands from other nations bordering Czechoslovakia that the parts of the country occupied by their minorities must now be handed back to *them*—and Hitler sympathised with these demands. Not only must the western provinces, the Sudetenland, be ceded to Germany, but the eastern provinces containing Polish and Hungarian populations must also be handed over to their parent countries. Czechoslovakia, in effect, must be dismembered.

The next 36 hours were passed by Mr Chamberlain in a mood of annoyance, frustration, and reproach. These sentiments he expressed to the Führer—who listened, courteously still but, one imagines, with a certain amount of sardonic amusement. And he showed no disposition to reduce his demands in any degree whatsoever, so a disconsolate

continued page vi





The voice in the wilderness. Winston Churchill described Munich as 'a disaster of the first magnitude'

THE CLIMATE OF APPEASEMENT

continued from page iv

Prime Minister returned to England to discover a stiffening of attitude in the country – which in some ways may have been a further disappointment to one who saw himself as the Peacemaker.

As a result of the emergence of this sudden wide distrust of Hitler, the decision was taken to reject the Godesberg terms. The mobilisation of the Czech army also took place undisturbed by recriminations from Britain or France, and in France itself a partial mobilisation was carried out. It seemed that the democracies were awakening to danger. On September 26, a letter from Chamberlain was delivered to Hitler, to which his only reply was that unless the Czechs acquiesced by 2 pm on September 28, German troops would march into the Sudetenland on October 1 – but in a speech he made three hours later, Hitler spoke accommodatingly of Britain and France (though crudely of Benes and Czechoslovakia) and announced: 'This is the last territorial claim I have to make in Europe.'

Chamberlain's promise of 'peace for our time'

Nevertheless, at 2 pm on Wednesday September 28 no Czech acquiescence had been received in Berlin, a Czech army of over 1,000,000 men waited behind a strong fortress line to defend their country if attacked, the French army was partially mobilised – and an order had gone out to the British fleet for the mobilisation of the Royal Navy.

Then at 3 pm Hitler sent a message to Chamberlain and Daladier suggesting a further meeting immediately at which Mussolini would also be present – but no Soviet representative and neither would the Czechs be invited to attend a conference which would presumably discuss their fate.

For the third time, the British Prime Minister flew to Munich.

It is possible, and perhaps also just, to sympathise with Mr Chamberlain in his dilemma up to this moment, for he had no experience of dealing with men of Hitler's mentality who, fortunately for the world, are rare in attainment of unbridled power. Mr Chamberlain's desire for world peace is also not a concept to which exception can be taken; but there is a price above which it is foolish to pay even for the most precious commodity.

At Munich, Mr Chamberlain on behalf of the British people and M Daladier for the French people signified their willingness to pay such a price. The conference began at noon on September 29, and at 2 am on September 30 a memorandum was signed by all four parties which virtually accepted the Godesberg ultimatum. German troops would begin moving in on October 1, the evacuation of Sudetenland would be completed by October 10, and an International Commission would eventually decide the new borders of Czechoslovakia – which would certainly not contain the western fortress line.

Czech delegates (who had been allowed to come to Munich and 'wait outside') were coldly informed of the decision, Chamberlain and Hitler both signed a paper signifying the desire of 'our two peoples never to go to war with one another again', and German divisions made ready to penetrate as deeply into Czechoslovakia as was deemed advisable for the moment. Mr Chamberlain then returned home, where he was greeted by cheering crowds at Heston airport, to whom he waved the paper which he and Hitler had signed, and read to them its contents. Later he waved the paper at more crowds outside No. 10 Downing Street, and announced: '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.'

The wave of relief which then swept over Britain as these words were repeated throughout the country was a spiritual phenomenon possibly comparable to a religious experience. The pubs that night were crowded with happy, light-hearted merry-makers who felt that a weight of worry had been lifted from their souls; and as the following morning's headlines dealt more with the document which Mr Chamberlain had signed with Hitler alone, than the one which he had signed with Hitler, Daladier, and Mussolini, that mood of euphoria continued for some days.

Then, slowly, details of the agreement over Czechoslovakia became available and some conception of the danger into which we had stepped, and the shame of our actions, began to percolate the public conscience; and in addition to comment and argument, there was soon the visible evidence of political event. The dismemberment of the 'model democracy' began immediately. German troops moved into Sudetenland on October 1 and within 24 hours Polish demands had been delivered for the return of Teschen – to which Czechoslovakia had little alternative but to yield. Then at the end of the month, Hitler and Mussolini agreed a new border between Hungary and Czechoslovakia – blandly announcing it to the world as the 'Vienna Award'.

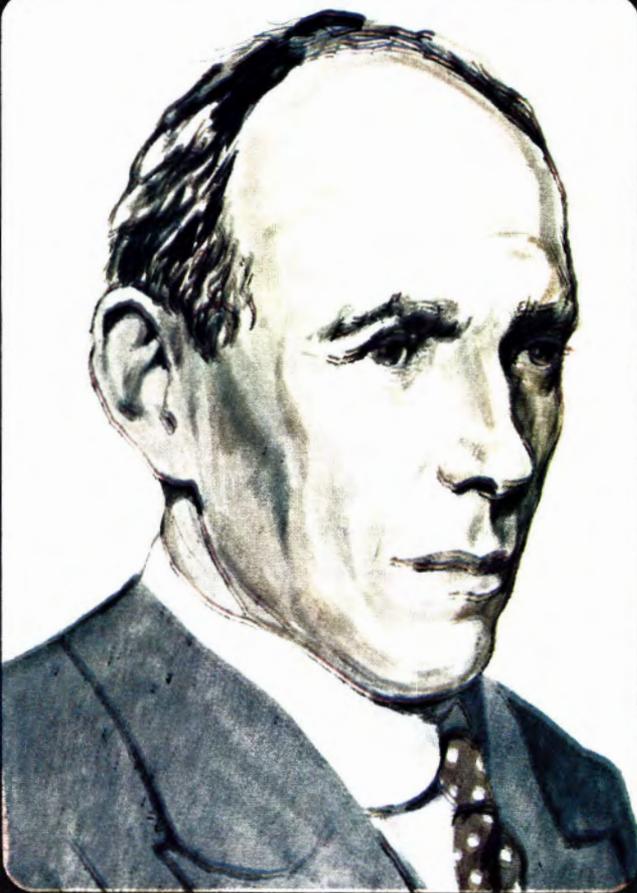
Hitler 'no longer a gentleman'

Dr Benes resigned as President and came eventually to live in England – but he was one of the more fortunate of his countrymen. During the following winter – 1938-39 – more and more disintegration took place as Hitler sowed seeds of discord between the different nationalities who had before lived in amity, and drove wedges of disaffection between Czechs and Slovaks. It was cleverly done, but voices other than Hitler's were being listened to now, as realisation of what had happened sank into the consciousness of the British people. The Germans were no longer popular and Czechoslovakia began to assume some of the romantic aura which had surrounded 'plucky little Belgium' between 1914 and 1918; a number of Britons even reflected bitterly on the fact that anti-Axis strength had now been reduced by 1,000,000 trained soldiers, that a fortress system had been lost, and so had the Skoda factories, which would now produce tanks for the dictators.

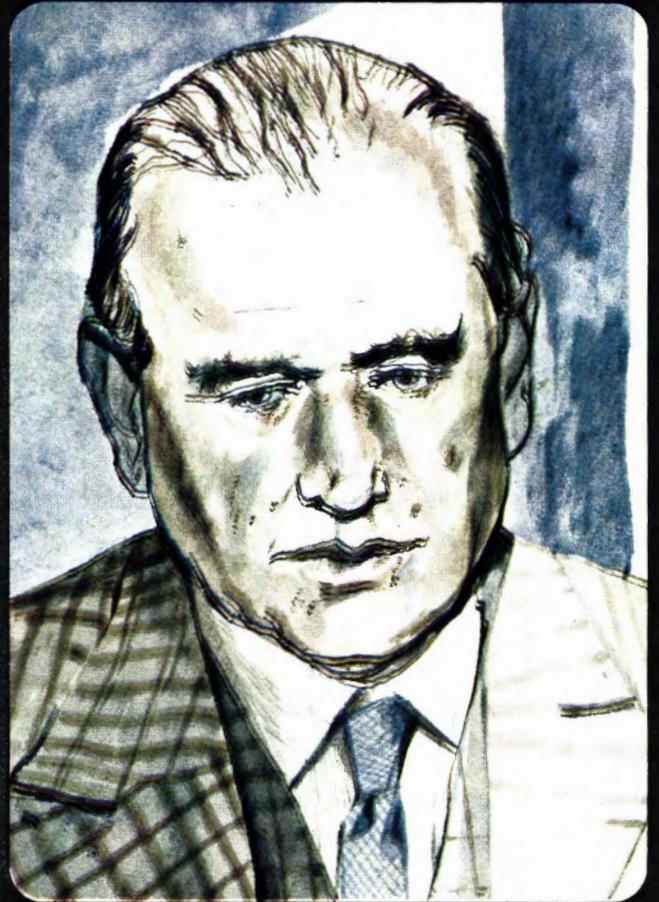
Then on March 14, 1939, encouraged and even prompted by Hitler, the province of Slovakia declared its independence of the rest of Czechoslovakia; on March 15, German troops moved out of the Sudetenland and into Prague, taking over Bohemia and Moravia; and the following day, with a bland ruthlessness which must have shaken even those who had co-operated with him, Hitler 'accepted' the protectorate of Slovakia whose independence had thus lasted two days. Thus was a modern state totally eliminated.

On March 17, his eyes opened at last, Mr Chamberlain openly accused Herr Hitler of breaking his word, and voiced an opinion many of us had been arriving at since before Christmas.

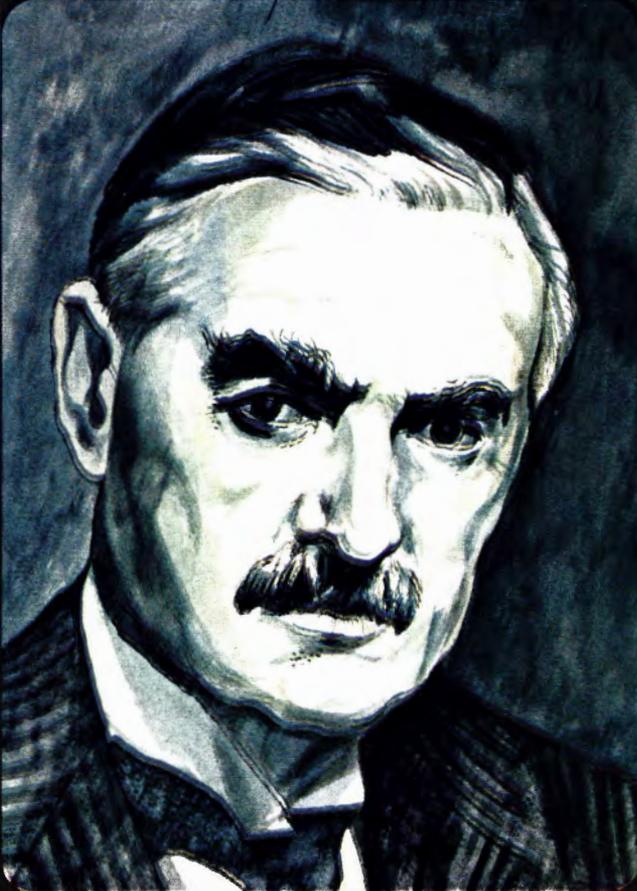
Hitler was a gentleman no more: he may even never have been one.



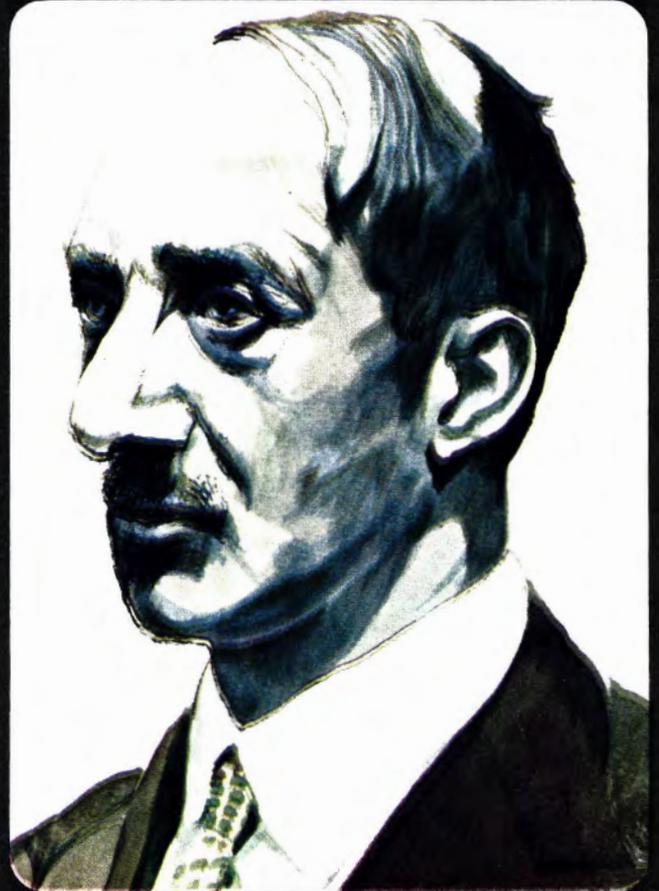
Viscount Halifax, British Foreign Secretary



Edouard Daladier, French Premier

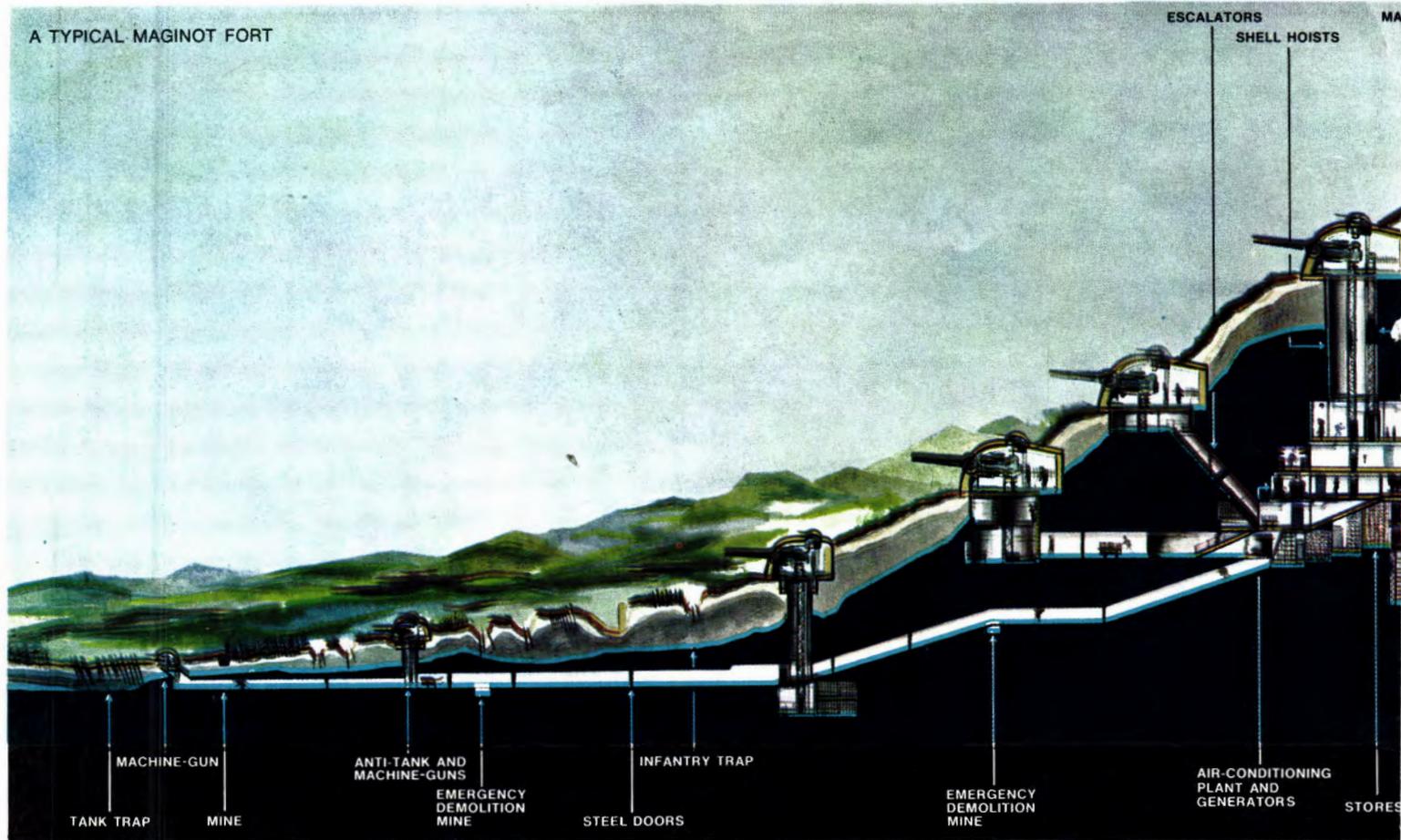


Neville Chamberlain, British Prime Minister



Georges Bonnet, French Foreign Minister

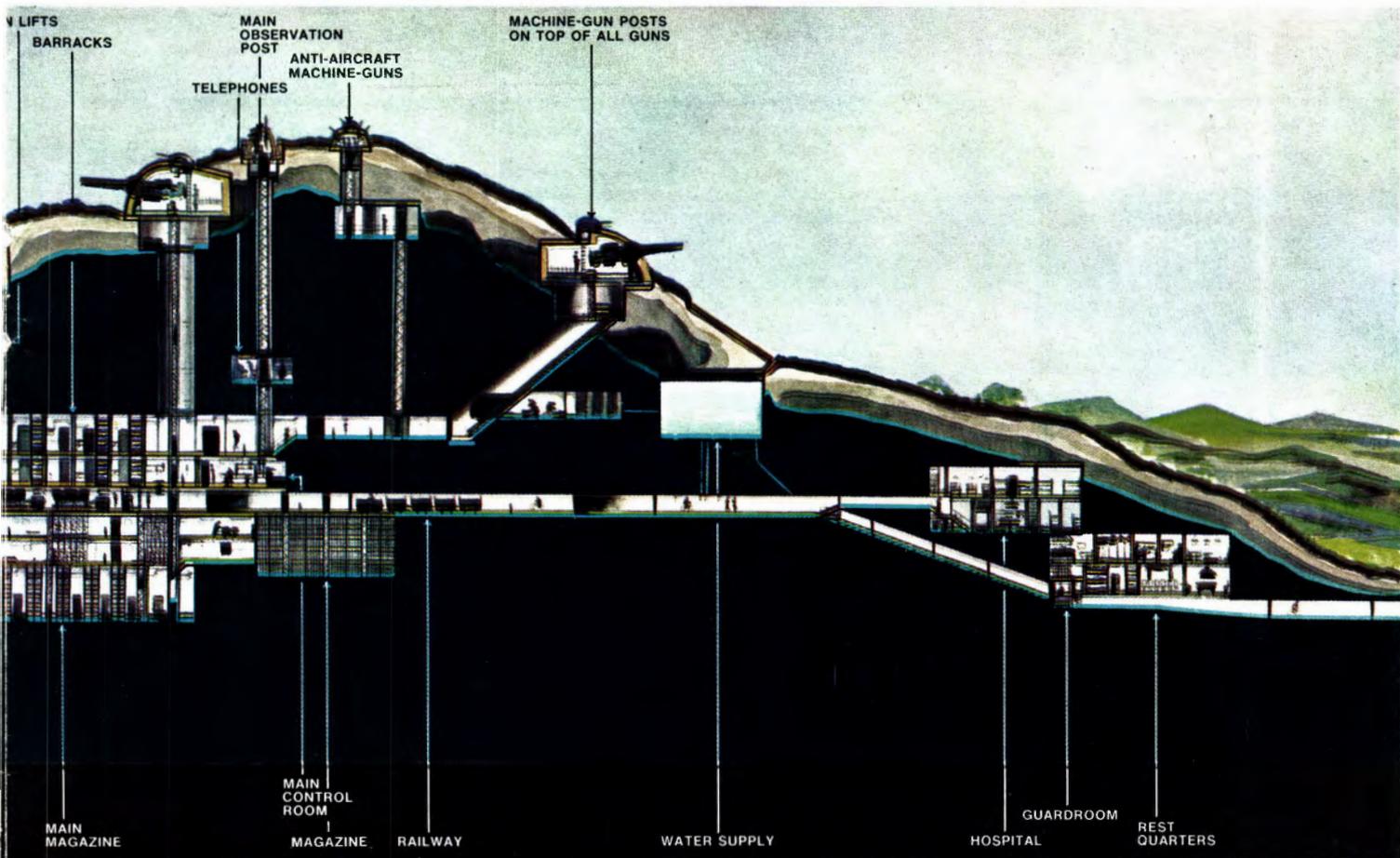
A TYPICAL MAGINOT FORT



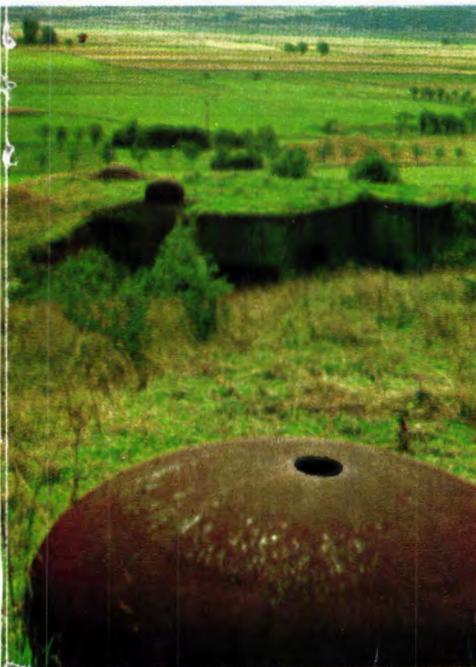
Today the tangible relics of the Maginot mentality still remain on France's eastern frontier, like these tank traps and ruined bunker

A battleship built on land

The Maginot Line was built during the 1930's (at first to protect only Alsace-Lorraine), and took ten years to construct. Eventually it stretched from Switzerland to Longuyon, where the Ardennes Forest begins. Against frontal attack it was presumed invincible, and so it set the pattern for Germany's Siegfried Line. The Maginot Line was a far cry from the trenches of the First World War: troops were quartered in air-conditioned compartments, there were recreation areas and supply depots—and even underground railways.



John Batchelor



Christopher Barker

One of the thousands of anti-tank domes – to combat tanks that never came

Now, crumbling and overgrown – the massive walls and parapets of the Maginot Line

But it was to engender among the French a fatal sense of false security – an attitude of complacency that came to be known as the 'Maginot mentality'.

After inspecting a Maginot fort at Welshtenberg in January 1940, Lord Alanbrooke had this to say in his diary:

'The fort reminded me of a battleship built on land, a masterpiece in its way, and there is no doubt that the whole conception of the Maginot Line is a stroke of genius. And yet! It gives me but little feeling of security, and I consider that the French would have done better to invest the money in the shape of mobile defences such as more and better aircraft and more heavy armoured divisions than to sink all this money into the ground.'

PRELUDE TO DISASTER

continued from page 1

which were felt by all to be just and reasonable. They were certainly profound.

Before the Treaty of Locarno was signed, Germany was excluded from the League of Nations and forcibly disarmed, her western defences dismantled and at the mercy of her French neighbour and hereditary enemy. Now all this was changed: Britain, France, Italy, and Belgium not only solemnly swore never to take advantage of her helplessness to violate her frontier, they also agreed to come to her aid if any one of their company should ever succumb to this temptation. Thus Germany had ceased to be a proscribed outcast. Though still subject to the old limitations on rearmament and therefore not yet an equal, she had been taken back into the European family of nations, and a year later she gained the further benefit of entry into that much wider mutual protection society, the League of Nations.

Thus was introduced the only five years of the inter-war period when it was possible to feel that the great hopes with which it had opened would not be belied.

Lingering suspicion

But while many men of good will and good sense like Austen Chamberlain, Stresemann, and Briand laboured to lead Europe into the ways of reconciliation, there remained, inevitably, enough grievance and resentment inside Germany for those of opposite nature and talents to work upon and foment. Likewise, there remained enough fear and suspicion on the other side—especially in France—for many attempts to take place at blocking the complete restoration of Germany to true equality; thus on both sides of the frontier the architects of reconciliation, operating within a democratic context that allowed no silencing of the voices of their opponents, had to contend with destructive forces that fed one upon the other—nationalist agitation in Germany serving to strengthen French opposition to further reconciliation, and vice versa.

It was in this somewhat murky political climate that the Austrian ex-corporal, who was to be revealed eventually as the greatest monster in history, could begin his climb to the summit of power. It was at first a slow climb, and there is every reason to believe that the lunatic fringe which supported it would never have become more than that had it not been for a fatal stroke of global misfortune.

In the autumn of 1929, an economic collapse began in America which dragged Germany, supported by American credits, down into a spiral of deflation and unemployment which provided the most fertile breeding-ground for those twin doctrines of despair, Communism and National Socialism. Thus four years later, on January 30, 1933, the nations of Europe awoke to find themselves confronted with a Germany now wholly different from the one with which they had dealt in the 'twenties—a Germany wholly in the grip of that lunatic fringe, openly vowed to the most barbaric cults, the most outspoken expansionism, the most murderous racialism.

Of course, the sinister elements in the

new German government were not immediately recognised, and appeasement—or 'the remedying of Germany's legitimate grievances', as it was called in those days—continued unabated. It was, however, appeasement from strength—for Hitler's Germany was at first militarily much weaker than even France alone; but with every new concession the balance of power was now to be altered in favour of a country that no longer asked only for equality, but openly aimed at supremacy and clamoured for 'Lebensraum'—which in reality meant other people's living-space.

A strong sense of self-preservation in the rest of Europe might at this point have indicated a changeover from the trusting indulgent attitudes of peaceful coexistence to the harsher mentality of the Cold War—but neither of these concepts existed then, and in Britain particularly it was felt that one could not possibly accept that there was no other solution to the problem of life with Hitler than that of maintaining one's superiority of naked power. Surely, the whole of mankind knew that international tensions were due only to 'misunderstandings' and that with patience and goodwill all 'these causes of conflict' could be eliminated.

Such was the mood in Britain, whose elected leaders at this time still had the handling of the overwhelming power vested in the victors of 1918. It was a mood compounded of wishful thinking, eager belief in Hitler's frequent protestations of goodwill, obsessive memories of the First World War, a lingering guilt complex towards the 'victim of Versailles', secret sympathy with the self-proclaimed defender of the West



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Nieuwe Rotterdamse Courant and in 1952 he became roving correspondent for the same newspaper, travelling extensively through Africa, the Middle East, and South-East Asia. In 1965 he received the Robert Schuman Prize instituted by the Netherlands Branch of the European Movement. J. H. Huizinga has written numerous articles for such periodicals as *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *Le Monde*, *New Statesman*, *The Reporter*, and *Foreign Affairs*; his books include *Confessions of a European in England* and *Mr Europe, A Political Biography of P. H. Spaak*.

against the 'Red Peril'—and of vague apprehensions, rooted in historical memory, of French aspirations to Continental dominance.

The mood of benevolence lasted in its unsullied purity for two whole years, during which time Hitler withdrew his country from the League of Nations, sent his disciples across his southern border to murder the Austrian Chancellor and, in early spring 1935, blandly announced that Germany had long been defying the prohibitions of Versailles by building an air force and that he

now intended to raise an army of 300,000 men by introducing military conscription.

At this point three major powers among the 1918 victors bestirred themselves in the face of danger, and their representatives met at Stresa; but they made an ill-assorted company. It has been rare in history that there has been a 'meeting of minds' between Britain and France; and the other member of the trio was Italy, who, since Mussolini had installed his Fascist dictatorship in 1925, had hardly been speaking the same political language as her erstwhile allies. She was certainly a most uncertain partner in keeping Hitler's Germany at bay, and if the history of the next five years shows many unedifying pages, it is largely because of the attempts to coax the Italian jackal away from his natural partner in barbarism and ignominy.

Exquisite predicament

These undignified attempts were to begin immediately after Stresa, for even at the time of the conference Italy was already planning an attack on a fellow-member of the League of Nations, Ethiopia—thus placing her ex-Allies in an exquisite predicament. Either Britain and France supported the League, sprang to the defence of Ethiopia, and flung Italy straight into Hitler's arms; or they reverted to the old game of jungle politics and wooed Italy's support against Hitler at Ethiopia's expense.

In retrospect it may appear to have been an easy choice, but it was far from being that at the time. If Britain and France felt themselves tempted to abandon the League, how would other, weaker countries behave with far less temptation? Moreover, one of the crucial pairs had already strayed from the path of true loyalty: Britain, unbeknownst to France, had just concluded an Anglo-German naval agreement with Hitler which allowed him greatly to increase his naval forces. When France found this out, she hesitated only briefly in attempting to secure Italy's friendship—perhaps in place of that of 'Perfidious Albion'—by letting Mussolini know that he had little to fear from French intervention in his African ambitions.

And then on September 11, 1935, the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Samuel Hoare, electrified the world with a call to all members of the League of Nations to follow a policy of 'steady and collective resistance to all acts of unprovoked aggression!' After so much had happened to undermine faith in the willingness of the great powers to act on principle instead of on expediency, this clarion call re-echoed across the world; here at last was the world's mightiest empire—as it then was—arousing from lethargy and raising the hue and cry against the lawbreaker.

Hoare's call was met by an enthusiasm and almost unanimous response as all but three members of the League agreed to impose sanctions on Italy; and to show that the will of the great majority was not idly to be ignored, Britain then sent two of her most imposing battleships, escorted by a cruiser squadron, through the Straits of Gibraltar. It was all most impressive.

It was all thus even more disillusioning when within three months it became clear that second thoughts had won the day. France preferred the Italian 'bird in hand' and indicated that should war be the outcome of this sudden militant support of the Covenant, Britain would have to bear the lion's share of the 'collective' fighting; Britain looked to her arms and became conscious of her traditional lack of a large standing army and even of a suddenly apparent weakness in her navy; the sophistries of those who argued that the League had been created to preserve peace, not to enforce the law by threatening war, made a deep impression. There was some hurried backstairs bargaining and eventually the Hoare-Laval Pact was signed in secret, an agreement which attempted to buy off Mussolini by offering large chunks of Ethiopia's still unconquered territory!

As it happened, such was the storm of popular indignation aroused when details of this unexpected *volte-face* became known, that the British Premier, disavowing his Foreign Secretary, was compelled to drop the proposals. 'They are now,' said Mr Baldwin on December 19, 1935, 'absolutely and completely dead.'

But so was the hope of vindicating the law and of saving Ethiopia, which fell to Italy's modern arms by May 1936; and so too was the hope of ever marshalling the combined forces of the League against any lawbreaker in general—and the menacing German danger in particular. Within two months of the abandonment of Ethiopia to her unhappy fate, a whole host of other small powers, who had until then put their faith in the strength of the Covenant of the League, fled from Geneva; Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Holland, and Spain all announced that they would no longer consider themselves bound to apply sanctions against an aggressor, or to allow the passage of troops across their territory on their way to restrain one.

From now on, the story takes a different character: an element of doom creeps into it. It is as if the Fates, despairing of these perversely well-intentioned and too peace-loving peoples who throw away opportunity after opportunity to save themselves, decided to abandon them—indeed to start conspiring against them.

In France, a Popular Front was elected to power, pledged to augment social reforms before considering military reinforcement; in Russia, Stalin's mass purge throughout all Russian life and in particular through the Red Army, estranged even those Western elements favourable to a *rapprochement* with the Bolsheviks, besides casting doubt on their military value. In Britain, a Prime Minister took over—Mr Neville Chamberlain—whose personal characteristics rendered him singularly unfit to appreciate the true nature either of the ever-growing threat to peace, or of the man who directed it with such diabolical genius.

Now was to follow the most afflicting tragedy, the most blatant betrayal, the most shameful 'expedient' of all—and the only comfort that can be picked from it is that when the full significance of what had passed sank into the popular conscience, the realisation came to all that the halt must now be called to Hitler's unbridled course.

At last, the victors of 1918 had been shocked into reality.



By 1926, seven years before Hitler became Führer, Mussolini had established himself as Europe's first Fascist dictator. In 1935 Fascist Italy fell on Ethiopia. But before long it was Hitler who had seized the initiative in Europe, and in the end Mussolini was being described as his faithful 'jackal'

THE TURBULENT YEARS

Hitler at the front, where he was twice awarded the Iron Cross. Blinded by a gas attack, he was still in hospital when the war ended ▼



▲ Hitler visits his comrades in Landsberg Prison after his own release in December 1924. While there he had written *Mein Kampf*. On the far right is Rudolf Hess



▲ The ageing Hindenburg (right) was the only man between Hitler and the top. Within an hour of his death in 1934 Hitler proclaimed himself the Führer

▶ A glum Hitler leaves Berlin after his failure to gain sole power. In 1933, however, he succumbed to the lures of coalition



▲ Street battles and demonstrations were commonplace in post-war Germany. Here (in 1930) the police break up a demonstration by the Communists—the Nazis' deadly rivals



General Ludendorff, champion of the extreme Right wing, backed Hitler in the abortive 1923 Munich Putsch



◀ Nazi electioneers in Frankfurt, shouting their slogans. The Nazis polled 6,500,000 votes in 1930, and double that in 1932. But in the fourth election in 1932 the Nazis lost 2,000,000 votes while the Communists gained 1,000,000

BETWEEN THE WARS

When SA chief Ernst Röhm threatened Hitler's power, he was liquidated. At the same time, the whole SA was purged during the 'Night of the Long Knives' ▼

1918 November 10: Armistice ending First World War is signed.

June 28: Germany signs the Treaty of Versailles, which returns Alsace-Lorraine to France and creates the Polish Corridor. Germany agrees to pay five billion dollars in gold marks—the first instalment of a giant reparations bill. The German army is cut to 100,000 volunteers; tanks and military aircraft are outlawed.

September 14: Hitler joins German Workers' Party (later to become Nazi Party).
July 31: At Weimar the German National Assembly adopts a constitution for the new 'Weimar Republic'.

1920 January: After ratification of the Treaty of Versailles, the League of Nations is created. First members are the chief Allied powers—Britain, France, Italy, Japan. But the US Senate fails to ratify the treaty and so takes no part in the League.

1921 Hitler has become absolute chief of Nazi Party.

1922 October 28: Mussolini marches on Rome with 25,000 Fascist troops, takes control of Italy.

1923 November 8: Hitler's abortive Putsch in Munich.

1925 December 1: The Locarno Pact—signed by Germany, Belgium, France, Great Britain, Italy—guarantees the inviolability of the German-Belgian and Franco-German frontiers. Germany, Belgium, and France agree to settle their disputes peacefully. As a result, the Allies agree to withdraw from the Rhineland.

1926 September: Germany joins the League.

1929 October 24: Wall Street crashes, wrecking the German economy.

1930 September: Nazis poll 6,500,000 votes to give them 107 Reichstag seats.

1931 September 18: Japanese forces attack Manchuria. The League protests; but Japan withdraws from League.

1932 July 31: Nazis become largest party in Reichstag. Hitler rejects coalition.

1933 January 30: Hitler becomes coalition Chancellor.

March 23: The Reichstag passes Hitler's Enabling Act, giving him absolute power.

October 14: Germany quits the League.

1934 June 30: 'Night of the Long Knives'.

August 2: Hindenburg dies; Hitler becomes 'Führer'.

October 1: Hitler orders his army to treble its strength to 300,000 men, and orders the creation of an illegal air force and the expansion of the navy.

1935 October 3: Italy invades Abyssinia. The League votes for sanctions. Mussolini persists.

1936 March 7: German troops enter the Rhineland.

July 16: Franco stages a military revolt in Spain. Western powers declare a policy of non-intervention, but Germany supplies Franco with planes, tanks, technicians.

October 25: Mussolini and Hitler declare the Rome-Berlin Axis.

November 25: Hitler signs the Anti-Comintern Pact with Japan.

1938 February 4: Hitler becomes Germany's supreme military commander.

March 12: Germany marches into Austria 'to quell civil disorder'. Next day Austria is declared part of Germany.

September 23: Hitler demands that the Czechs evacuate the Sudetenland.

September 30: Hitler, Chamberlain, Mussolini, and Daladier sign the Munich Agreement.

November 9/10: The 'Crystal Night'.

1939 March 15: German troops march into Prague and take over Bohemia and Moravia.

March 16: Hitler declares that 'Czechoslovakia has ceased to exist.'



▲ The West did nothing to stop Hitler's troops when they marched into the Rhineland. Later, the Führer admitted: 'The 48 hours after the march into the Rhineland were the most nerve-racking in my life'

◀ The Reichstag fire in 1933 gave Hitler the excuse to outlaw the Communists and initiate a reign of terror, implemented by storm troopers and secret police

The editorial directors of this unique history



The late **Sir Basil Liddell Hart**, Editor-in-Chief. Born in 1895, Sir Basil was wounded and gassed on the western front during World War I. At the age of 24, he wrote the first post-war manual on *Infantry Training* and subsequently edited the weapon manual *Small Arms Training*. In 1924 he was appointed Military Correspondent of *The Daily Telegraph*. Ten years later he moved to *The Times* as its adviser on defence as a whole. Meanwhile he had also been Military Editor of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. In 1937 he became personal adviser to the War Minister, Mr Hore-Belisha. He resigned in 1938 to press the needs of Britain's army publicly, but once war began he felt it necessary to remain silent in case his writings betrayed the military weaknesses of the country. After the war he spent many months interviewing captured German generals and analysing their campaigns with them. Sir Basil Liddell Hart wrote some thirty books and his writings have been translated into more than thirty languages. He was awarded the Chesney Gold Medal of the Royal United Service Institution in 1964 (along with Major-General J. F. C. Fuller), and Hon. D.Lit. of Oxford University the same year. He was also an honorary fellow of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. In 1966 he was knighted.

A biography of Editor Barrie Pitt is on page iv.

A few of the many distinguished writers

Sir Basil Liddell Hart
Editor-in-Chief

Barrie Pitt
Editor

Constantine FitzGibbon
Best-selling author

Sir Francis de Guingand
Chief of Staff to Montgomery

Major-General Eric Dorman O'Gowan
Chief of Staff to Auchinleck

Alistair Horne
Hawthornden prizewinner; best-selling author

Christopher Hibbert
Heinemann Award winner; best-selling author

John Connell
Well-known journalist and historical writer; his article in the History of the Second World War was the last thing he wrote

A. J. P. Taylor
Historian and journalist

General Walter Warlimont
On the staff of Oberkommando der Wehrmacht

Generalleutnant Alfred Gause
Chief of Staff to Rommel

General Walther Nehring
Ex-tank expert, Chief of Staff to Guderian, Panzer division commander in desert and Russia

Alan Clark
Author of Barbarossa

Olivia Manning
Best-selling author

John Erickson
Head of Dept of Govt, Manchester University, and expert on Russian campaigns

Sir Francis Toker
Commander of the famous 4th Indian Division

Sir Geoffrey Evans
Commanded brigades in desert and divisions in Burma. Since written many books on war

Major Tokuji Morimoto
Japanese officer

Joseph Baritz
Expert on Russian partisan warfare

Hervé Laroche
French banker and social historian

Commander M. G. Saunders
Ex-head of Foreign Documents, Admiralty; author and translator

Denis Richards
Official Historian for Air Ministry, ex-head of Morley College

Peter Elstob
Author (Warriors of The Working Day)

Jerrard Tickell
Best-selling author (Odette, Appointment with Venus)

Lt-Commander Peter Kemp
Head of Admiralty Library, author

Pieter Lessing
South African writer, soldier, and political journalist

Alan Palmer
Author, head of History Department, Highgate College

Wing Commander Asher Lee
Journalist and writer on aviation matters

Freiherr von der Heydte
German airborne commander and historian

Dan Davin
Official historian of Crete campaign for New Zealand government

Arthur Slater
Ex-Under Secretary, Air Ministry

J. M. Mackintosh
Foreign Office expert on Red Army

John Foley
Author of The Boilerplate War, etc

Major T. W. Williams
Commander of British airborne Pathfinder unit, pioneer in free-falling technique

Ralph Barker
Journalist and author

Rt Hon Sir John Smythe
VC, MC, divisional commander in Burma

J. H. Huizinga
Foreign affairs expert

Roger Manvell and Heinrich Fraenkel
Best-selling authors. Books on Goebbels, Goering, etc

Melita Maschmann
Ex-Nazi youth leader (reformed) now journalist

Colonel Sawczynski
Head of Sikorski Historical Institute

Donald Watt
Lecturer in Political Science, London School of Economics

Colonel Antonov
Battalion commander, Red Army

Kapitän zur See Bidlingmaier
German Admiralty historian

Dudley Pope
Best-selling author

Sir Henry McCall
Ex-naval attaché at Buenos Aires

A. F. Upton
Department of History, St Andrews. Author of books on Finnish war

Major-General R. H. Barry
Chief of Intelligence to Lord Gort at Dunkirk

Major Macksey
Tank expert and author

Major-General J. L. Moulton
Writer on military history, ex-head of Combined Ops

Dr Jean Charles
Belgian historian at École Royale Militaire, Brussels

Oberst Witzig
Commander German airborne detachment at Eben-Emael

John Hillaby
Scientific writer, author of Journey to the Jade Sea

Colonel A. Goutard
French historian

A. Swinson
Author

Generalleutnant Walter Charles de Beaulieu
Chief of Staff, 4th Panzer Group

Generalmajor Alfred Philippi
Infantry commander

The scope of the *History of the Second World War* is illustrated by the random selection of subjects outlined below. All aspects of the conflict, the grand strategy, the blow by blow description of battles, the political under-currents, are recorded with an authority and style that make for instructive and compelling reading. With each weekly issue the history builds into a comprehensive account of the six most dramatic years of our time.



Battles for the Rhine



The Warsaw rebellion



Hitler's 'Fortress Europe'



The Ardennes



North African campaign



The armoured balance



Into the Reich



The war at home



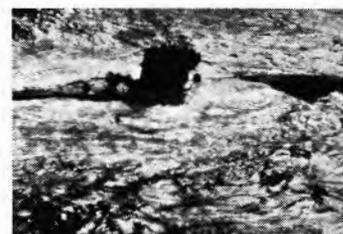
Fight for the Solomons



Kohima: the turning point



At the summit



Battle of the Atlantic



Campaign in Italy



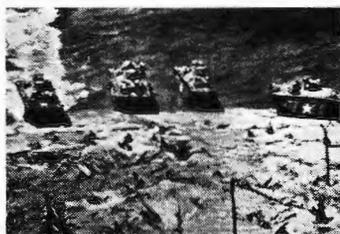
The bombing of Dresden



Italy: the Axis view



D-Day



The atoll war



The Hitler bomb-plot



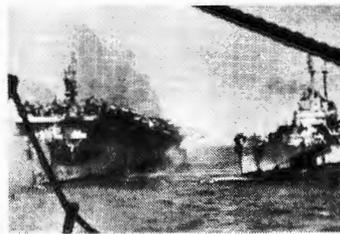
Kursk: armoured clash



Invasion of Italy



Battle for Okinawa



Strategy at sea



In the Balkans



Liberation of Paris

World War One Losses

☐ = 100,000 Dead

BRITAIN	761,000
BRITISH EMPIRE	269,000
FRANCE	1,358,000
UNITED STATES	114,000
RUSSIA	1,700,000
ITALY	450,000
GERMANY	2,000,000
AUSTRIA-HUNGARY	1,100,000
TURKEY	370,000



The Aftermath

The French cemetery at Verdun, scene of the ten-month battle that claimed 700,000 lives. When the full bill of casualties became available, military thinkers the world over were united on one point: no future war could ever be fought again like the last one

Polish Strength

 In peacetime, the Polish army consisted of 30 infantry divisions, 11 cavalry brigades, two motorised brigades, and a number of heavy artillery, tank, engineer, and signal units. The air force, which was attached to the army, had 15 fighter and 12 reconnaissance-bomber flights of ten planes each, four medium bomber flights of nine planes each, and 12 army co-operation flights of seven planes each. The small Polish navy consisted of four destroyers, five submarines, two gunboats, a mine-layer, and six mine-sweepers.

There were also the Frontier Defence Corps (KOP), organised to protect the eastern frontier, and a National Defence composed mainly of reservists and men below conscription age. Poland's total armed strength was 370,000 men, with 2,800,000 trained reserves.

On mobilisation the army's infantry strength was to be increased from 30 to 39 divisions, all other units were to be strengthened, and the air force was to be reorganised into a Bomber Brigade and a Pursuit Brigade. Because the Germans were expected to use, as a pretext for aggression, any public announcement of Poland's mobilisation, three-quarters of the Polish armed forces would be mobilised at 72 hours' notice by individual call-up, and the remainder in a general mobilisation announcement on posters.

At the outbreak of war, the modernisation plan for the armed forces was only about one-fifth completed. The air force had only 400 aircraft in the first line – and all but 36 of those were obsolete. The motorised force had 225 modern and 88 obsolete light tanks, 534 reconnaissance carriers, and 100 armoured cars, all

obsolescent.

Top priority had been given to modernising anti-aircraft and anti-tank guns. Anti-aircraft defence units had 414 modern and 94 obsolete guns as well as 750 obsolete machine-guns. Each infantry division had 27 anti-tank guns and 92 anti-tank rifles, and each cavalry brigade had 14 to 18 anti-tank guns and 54 to 66 anti-tank rifles, all modern. Polish artillery was modern but compared unfavourably in calibre and range with the German. Each infantry division had the support of 48 guns, six of them heavy.

Communication between the armies and High Command was over the civilian telegraph and telephone network (which was mainly above ground), and while radio communication within the army was modernised, obsolete signalling equipment was still being used.



The Polish Plan of Defence

 The Polish Commander-in-Chief, Marshal Rydz-Smigly, gave this outline of the Polish plan in May 1939: *My plan of operation is based on the hypothesis of a German attack against Poland with the majority of their forces. The plan is a defensive one. Its aim is to prevent the destruction of our forces before the start of our Allies' offensive in the west by inflicting on the Germans the greatest possible losses, by defending certain areas necessary for conducting the war, and by exploiting all opportunities for counteraction by our reserves. I must accept at the beginning of the war the loss of certain parts of Polish territory which will later be regained. When, as a result of the Allies'*

determined and serious activity, the pressure on the Polish front decreases, I will act according to the situation.

The Polish Command recognised the Germans' numerical and material superiority, but the revolution in warfare, which resulted from their great superiority in fast-moving mechanised formations and air power, came as a surprise. The only possible remedy to this superiority was help from the Allies. In his order of the day on September 1, Marshal Rydz-Smigly wrote: 'Regardless of the duration of the war and the sacrifices endured, the final victory will belong to us and our Allies,' clearly implying the vision of a protracted sacrifice before the final, far-off victory.

We decided not to use a rigid, stationary defence during the first phase of the campaign, hoping that a mobile defence would

permit us to hold a defensive front based on the fortifications near the frontier in Upper Silesia, and in other sectors not more than 60 miles from the frontier. The main German onslaught, which would come from Silesia, was expected to make a deep indentation in the front, so Polish reserves were to be used there for counteraction to hold up the Germans until the start of the Allied offensive in the west.

Accordingly, the Polish forces were deployed with three armies in the bend of the Vistula: the Pomorze Army (five infantry divisions, one cavalry brigade) on the right wing in the Torun-Bydgoszcz area; the Poznan Army (four infantry divisions, two cavalry brigades) in the centre around Poznan-Kalisz; and the Lodz Army (four infantry divisions, two cavalry brigades) on the left south-west of Lodz.



Germany's pride: her Panzers, swift, mobile, and potent



Poland's pride: her horsed cavalry, equipped with machine-guns but hopelessly obsolete

Supporting these troops were two groups in second line reserve: the Kutno Group (three infantry divisions) behind the Pomorze and Poznan Armies, and the Prusy Army (eight infantry divisions, one cavalry brigade) behind the left wing of the Lodz Army.

We planned to cover the flanks with independent operational group Narew and the Modlin Army, supported by operational group Wyszokow, in the north, and with the Krakow and Karpaty Armies, supported by reserve group Tarnow, in the south.

Shortly before the war the plan was slightly altered to allow the Modlin, Lodz, and part of the Pomorze Armies to move nearer the frontier. Another deviation, the result of fears that Hitler might create a *fait accompli* by seizing the free city of Danzig, was to send an Intervention Corps of two infantry divisions to Pomerania to counter any German action. Later it became necessary to cover these troops by moving units of the Pomorze Army towards the German frontier in the Corridor, moves described by the Commander-in-Chief as 'an operational absurdity into which I am forced by political considerations'.

The main tasks for the Polish air force were for the Bomber Brigade to attack the Germans' ground forces and communications, and for the Pursuit Brigade to defend against air attacks. On August 30, in anticipation of aggression, all air force units were moved from their peace-time airfields to their operational landing grounds. Polish navy destroyers, for the same reason, were ordered to sail to Great Britain.

The German Plan of Attack

Despite the unfavourable conditions of the Treaty of Versailles, the German army had been excellently equipped by General von Seeckt; and during the years 1932-35, against enormous difficulties resulting from the opposition of the General Staff, General Guderian (whom I had the honour to assist) had advocated the revolutionary concept of an operationally independent tank force comprising armoured and motorised vehicles of all kinds — a concept which had been developed from the teachings of such men as Captain Liddell Hart and General Fuller. Now, in September 1939, the hour had come to put these advanced theories to the test, and Guderian and his friends looked forward to it with full confidence in their new mobile formations, if without enthusiasm for war.

In fact, there was little enthusiasm for war anywhere; most of the officers were well aware of the possible political and military difficulties which Germany and its armed forces might encounter. But Hitler overrode these objections, which he regarded as defeatist. He believed in his intuition, and grossly underestimated both his opponents and his influence on world opinion.

As a result of the Polish mobilisation on March 25, 1939, Hitler had decided to resolve the German-Polish question by force, even at the risk of a probable outbreak of war, since he believed he could localise any such conflict. The conclusion, on August 23, of the pact with the Soviet Union reinforced this attitude. For Poland, despite the British guarantees, the situation had become intolerable: she was bounded on both sides by powerful enemies who had just become reconciled to each other, and speedy assistance from the West,

in spite of many assurances, was most improbable. Hitler, for his part, reckoned on a Western renunciation of military intervention similar to those which had taken place in 1936, in 1938, and again in the spring of 1939.

The German plan (known as 'Fall Weiss', or 'Operation White') was influenced by four main considerations:

- Poland's unfavourable military and geographical situation, which laid her open to encirclement by high-speed forces from the north and south;
- the decision of the German Command to accept a serious risk in the west in order to ensure ample superiority in the east and secure a quick victory before the Allies could help Poland;
- the confidence of the German Command in their new tank troops and other highly mobile units, without whose operations neither local supremacy nor a rapid conclusion of the fighting was conceivable;
- the threat to Poland of a Russian attack in the east.

Not until the beginning of July 1939 was any plan formed for an attack on Poland. The plan had no predecessor, since until then only defensive measures had been devised to meet the circumstances which had arisen since 1918. General von Brauchitsch, the Commander-in-Chief of the army, outlined the plan in his first operational order for the campaign: *The object of the operation is the destruction of the Polish armed forces. The idea of execution is, by a surprise entry into the Polish territory, to forestall an orderly mobilisation and concentration of the Polish army and to destroy the mass of the Polish army expected west of the Vistula-Narew line by a concentric attack from Silesia on one side and from Pomerania-East Prussia on the other side.*

The German Plan of Attack (continued)

The expected interventions against this operation from Galicia must be eliminated.

The political situation, as viewed by the Nazi leaders, demanded the opening of the war with powerful surprise attacks which would lead to rapid results, and this was only possible if armoured units were used. Army Group South, consisting of the VIII, X, and XIV Armies under Generaloberst von Rundstedt, and Army Group North, consisting of the III and IV Armies under Generaloberst von Bock, were formed to carry out the operation.

Of Army Group South, attacking from Silesia, the main armoured force of the X Army was to attack between Zawiercie and Wielun in the direction of Warsaw, secure the Vistula crossings and, in co-operation with Army Group North, destroy enemy pockets of resistance in western Poland. The XIV Army was to cover the right flank of this attack with tank support while the VIII Army protected the left flank between Poznan and Kutno. Army Group North was to establish communications between Germany and East Prussia, and advance to Warsaw from East Prussia to cut off the enemy north of the Vistula. The air force was to destroy Poland's air

force, disrupt rail communications, and support the army; the navy was to keep open the sea routes to East Prussia and blockade the Gulf of Danzig.

Difficulties arose out of Hitler's political demand that no overt mobilisation or advance should take place, but this problem was solved by setting eight infantry divisions to work, continuously from the end of June onwards, on field fortifications as a kind of 'East Wall' behind which all mobile divisions could assemble for the first wide-scale manoeuvres of their kind. To bolster the forces in East Prussia, certain units (among them the IV Tank Brigade) were openly transported by sea from Germany on the pretext of first taking part in a mass parade at the Tannenberg Memorial, and then participating in manoeuvres.

The operational plan was bold and daring. The X Army, under General der Artillerie von Reichenau, was to advance through the enemy to a depth of about 185 miles, right up to Warsaw, using the mass of its armoured units and ignoring its flanks and rear. It was rapidly to silence the Polish defence on the west bank of the Vistula before the Polish forces could withdraw behind the river and organise a new resistance.

No army had ever organised and deployed such large and highly mobile forces in

such comparatively confined regions. Would it be possible to control and supply so many thousands of vehicles on the Polish road network deep in the enemy's rear? And would it be possible to co-ordinate the high-speed forces with the infantry to ensure the unity and continuity of the whole offensive?

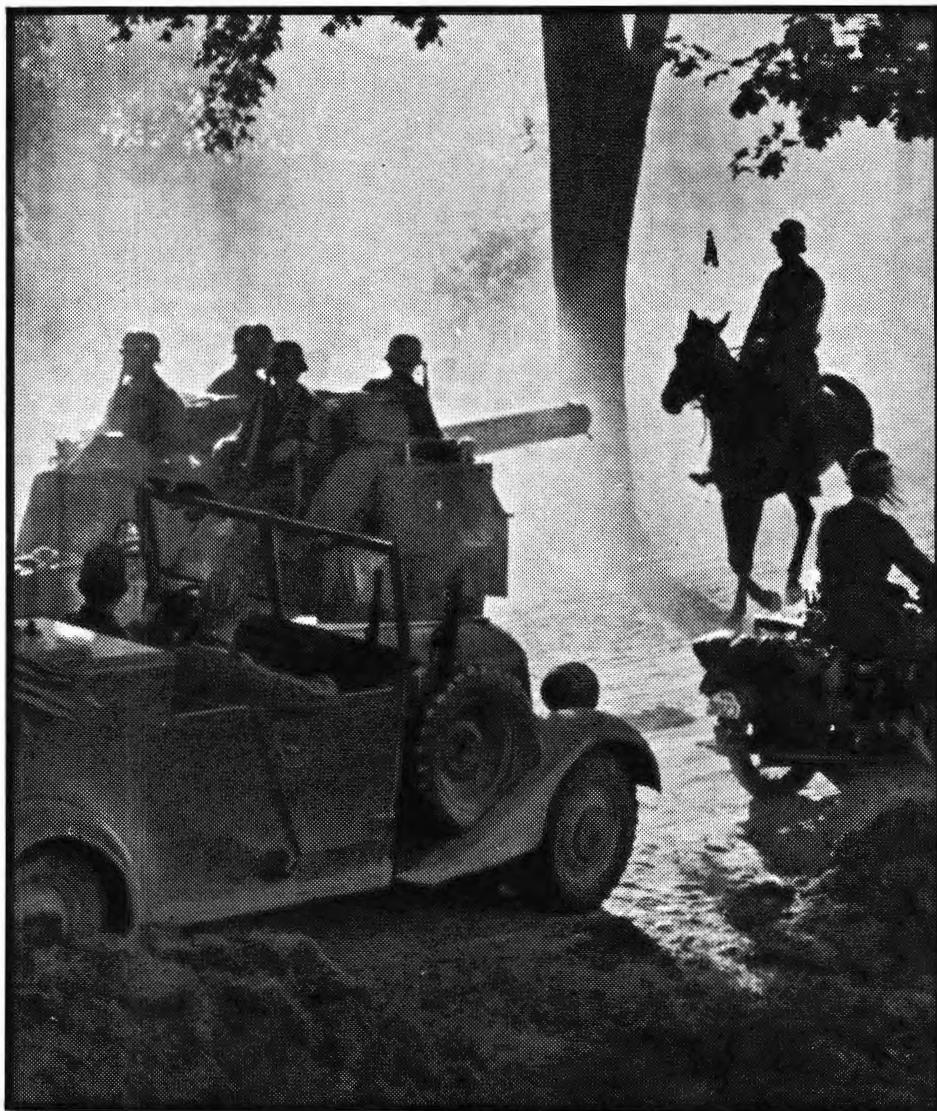
At the same time, attacks were to be launched from the direction of Slovakia and from Pomerania and East Prussia with the object of containing the enemy forces. The success of this manoeuvre depended on speedy results and on the co-operation of all units to bridge the 185-mile-wide gap between the two army groups, with the III Army advancing from East Prussia to isolate the enemy's stand on the other side of the Vistula, leaving them no operational freedom.

The one great hazard was that an adaptable Polish command could order a co-ordinated attack by almost all their forces on one of the two German army groups, leaving only a delaying force against the other. The Polish Poznan Army was in quite a favourable position to do this: since the German plan left no effective opponents to engage it, it could be used as circumstances warranted. The German Command was well aware of the risk it faced. But having carefully weighed the dangers, it remained confident that it had correctly estimated the attitudes of its friends and foes in the East and West.

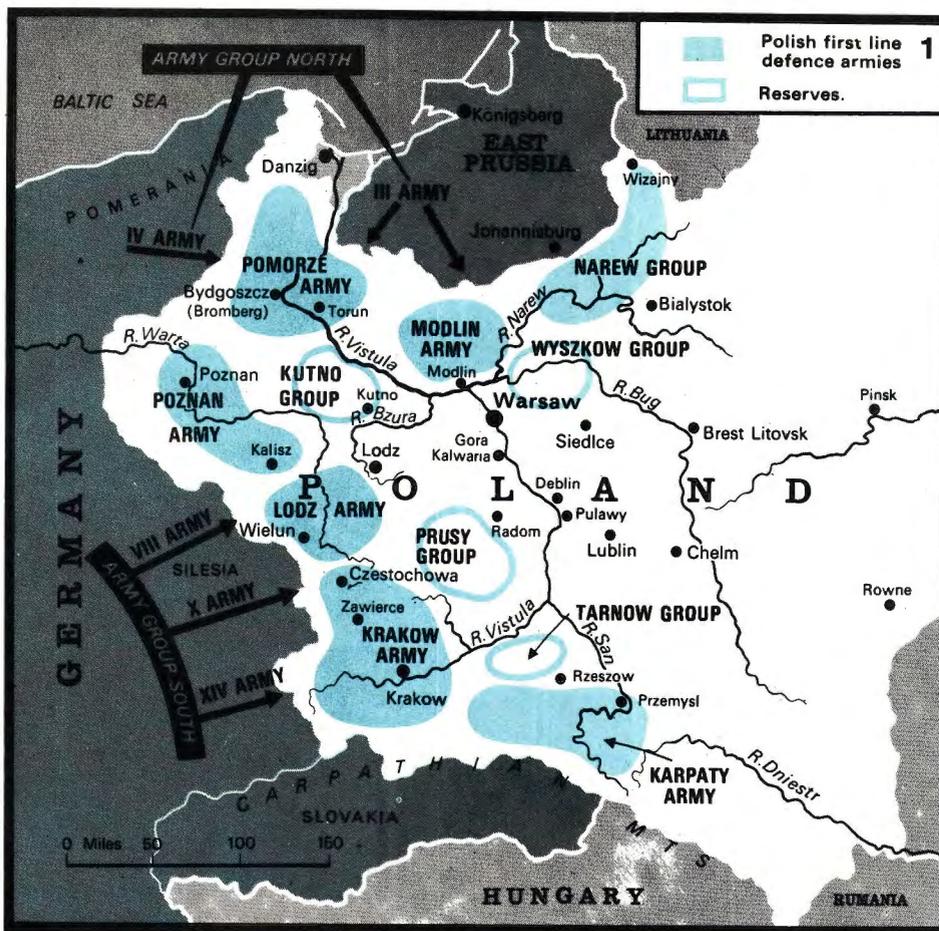
In view of the heavy French superiority in the west, the attack on Poland had to be handled rapidly and decisively, so that the weak German forces on the western front could be reinforced as soon as Poland seemed defeated. If the French army—with its 99 divisions and 2,500 armoured combat vehicles, reinforced in mid-September by two British divisions—had attacked before victory was secured in Poland, Germany might have lost the war at the onset. Hitler ordered the attack on the afternoon of August 25, 1939, and about two hours later the German army in the east left its position of readiness for the fateful march over the Polish frontier between the Carpathian Mountains and Lithuania. But because of the signing of the Anglo-Polish treaty at 5.40 pm on the same day, Hitler decided to call off the attack, following the advice of his Commander-in-Chief, who was seeking to preserve the peace. Despite the imposed radio silence the order to halt was passed right up to the front line—a masterly achievement in communication technique.

The halt was generally regarded by the army as a psychological and diplomatic weapon in the political war of nerves, similar to that used in the previous autumn before entering Czechoslovakia. But since the Poles had observed the advance and had secretly begun to mobilise the Germans lost their planned operations: surprise, and with it all the advantages which might have ensued. On the other hand, they too were able to use the time for further mobilisation. On August 30 the Polish mobilisation was officially announced, and on the next day Hitler reissued the command to attack. All hopes of a peaceful settlement were shattered.

The German invasion and the Polish defence are detailed on page 21.



German forces on the drive through Poland



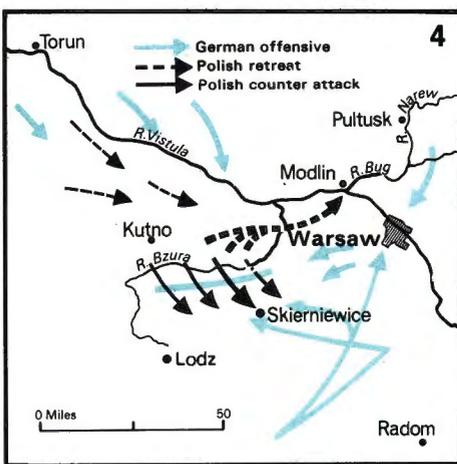
1. September 1, 1939: How the forces were aligned on the day of the German attack. The Germans struck from three directions—from the north, south, and west

2. The first five days: By September 5, German forces had broken through the Polish cordon formation and had overrun the Polish Corridor. From the south the mechanised X Army was ramming its way towards Warsaw. The jaws of the inner pincer were closing

3. The push to Warsaw: From September 6 to the 10th the Germans kept up their drive towards Warsaw. III and IV Armies in Army Group North were pressing towards the Polish capital while VIII and X Armies of Army Group South thrust upwards in the direction of Warsaw and Radom. But the southern armies were in for a big surprise at the Bzura river

4. Battle of the Bzura: The Polish attack at the Bzura on September 9 was their only large-scale, vigorous countermove. The Poles had meant to jab at the relatively inactive German centre, but Rundstedt and Manstein, diverting their forces and throwing in reserves, held the Poles in a vicious battle on a narrow front and routed them. Meanwhile, other units of Army Group South were beginning the assault on the Polish capital

5. End of the campaign: While part of Army Group South was occupied at the Bzura, Guderian's armoured corps smashed down towards Brest Litovsk, capturing the town on September 14, and then made contact with Kleist's armour coming up from the south. On September 17 the Red Army intervened from the East, crushing any remaining Polish hopes. Two days later, the 100,000-man Poznan Army surrendered to Army Group South. Though Warsaw held out for 8 more days, for all practical purposes the campaign was over



Pzkw-IV: heavy-weight of the Panzer forces



The German Invasion

SThe operations which took place between September 1 and 3 were successful from the German point of view, even if they did not achieve all that had been hoped for. Apprehension about the irrevocable slip into war began to ease. The bold German operational plan appeared to be working, hastily organised formations, without reserves, had proved themselves in battle, and the new Panzer units had withstood their first test under fire. The Polish cordon formations had been broken through, the disputed Polish Corridor—which had separated East Prussia from Germany—had been overrun, and the X Army—with its seven mechanised divisions followed by six infantry divisions—had broken into the front to the west of Warsaw.

The operational pincer movement planned for west of the Vistula began to take shape, and it appeared even then that the Polish army, lacking room to manoeuvre, would have to face the unfavourable prospect of a decisive battle west of the river. Clearly, the Polish Commander-in-Chief, Marshal Rydz-Smigly, should have recognised by the second day that the campaign would be lost if help from the Allies failed to come.

Forcing a decision

Army Group South then decided to force a decision in front of the Vistula and San rivers, while the XIV Army pressed forwards through an early crossing of the San to overcome any defence east of the Vistula. Army Group North, with a similar estimate of the situation, considered setting up a strong northern arm consisting of Guderian's XIX Panzer Corps and three infantry divisions for use in the direction of Brest Litovsk-Lublin.

At first the Army High Command rejected the proposal on the grounds that the strength of this army must be held together to prepare for a transfer to the west. But on September 5 the High Command adopted the view that the enemy would retire behind the Vistula-Narew line, and so it issued a new objective—encirclement of the rest of the Polish army east of the Vistula. Army Group North was now to attack with its III Army and Guderian's Panzer Corps on the Warsaw-Siedlce line, and Army Group South should

attack with its XIV Army across the San and in the direction of Lublin, the XXII Tank Corps covering the extreme flank.

There was heavy fighting as the armies advanced. The XIV Army captured Rzeszow but failed to reach the middle San. The X Army, using three tank corps against the line from Pulawy-Deblin-Radom and on to Gora Kalwaria, succeeded completely in taking over the Vistula up to Warsaw and cutting off Polish forces in the Radom basin. The VIII Army, so far used in echelon to protect the flank of the X Army, was detailed to pursue the fleeing enemy at the greatest possible speed, intending to cut off the intact Poznan Army on the northern flank of the Vistula, thus preventing it from making contact with the X Army.

From Bzura to Russian invasion

Encouraged by the results they had achieved so far, the Germans reckoned only with a Polish retreat, and did not contemplate an attack on the northern flank of the VIII Army. They were in for a big surprise.

The Polish attack on the Bzura, on September 9, was the only vigorous, large-scale counterattack initiated by the Polish High Command, and was intended to exploit the relative inactivity in the German centre. Instead, the thrust was turned into a decisive Polish defeat by the energetic tactical measures of Army Group South. By a brilliant diversion of the XV and XVI Panzer Corps and parts of the X Army, and by throwing in reserves from the west, Rundstedt and his Chief-of-Staff, von Manstein, forced the enemy into a battle on a narrow front which led ultimately to the greatest encirclement so far.

German Army Group North did not pursue. After fighting in the Corridor, Guderian's XIX Panzer Corps reached the Johannesburg region in East Prussia and was ordered to Siedlce via Wizajny, contrary to Guderian's own proposal to move to the open spaces around Brest Litovsk. Even so, Bock declined to tie the supplies for his Panzer units and his four high-speed divisions to the marching speed of his infantry. In so doing he created the first independently operating tank army in the history of war.

On September 9 the Army High Command gave instructions for a double encirclement east of the Vistula. The new arrangement involved bringing up high-speed forces so

that their co-operation with Army Group South would be possible even east of the Bug. By moving XXII Panzer Corps on the right flank of the XIV Army across the upper and middle San and on towards Chelm, the plan led German forces deep into Polish territory without considering the threat from France—a great risk in view of the exceedingly bad transport situation in Poland.

Army Group North issued a new command to Guderian's armoured units—to attack Brest Litovsk in the rear of the enemy. The capture of this town, except for a strong citadel, on September 14, made ultimate German victory inevitable.

There was no valid military reason for the inactivity of the French, who were still in a position to quench the flames of the igniting Second World War. Their countryman Jean Dutord proclaimed: 'The French generals held the tools of success in their hands.'

The French Commander-in-Chief, Gamelin, wrote on September 10 to the Commander-in-Chief of the collapsing Poles: 'More than half our active divisions are engaged in battle in the north-east. It is impossible to do more.' And the French Army communiqué of September 11 stated: 'Our attacks made considerable progress east of the Saar.'

False reports

On September 16 New York radios broadcast that 'hundreds of thousands of French and German troops are fighting a fearful battle,' and on September 19 the London short-wave transmitter sent this message: 'The fighting extends over a front of 160 kilometres. Other French troops are already 16 kilometres beyond the German frontier.' This, however, was not the case. In fact, ships of neutral countries were sailing along the upper Rhine, their crews waving to both sides and exchanging greetings with them. In other words, there was no fighting.

Although individual battles continued into early October, the culmination of the campaign came in mid-September, when the second large pincer movement east of the Bug began to become effective. From September 17 Soviet troops occupied Polish territory up to the Bug and disarmed the Polish forces there. This incursion came as a great surprise to the German military command because the political leaders had given no indication of Russia's intentions.

The Polish Defence

TThe Second World War began, for the Poles and the Germans, on September 1, 1939. At 0445 hours precisely, the Germans launched their forces in a major pincer movement—exhibiting to the world their method of using fast, powerful, and violent thrusts of highly mechanised army units—a method soon to be universally known as *Blitzkrieg*.

Cast far ahead of the ground troops, the Luftwaffe aircrews set about their two-fold task: to pound the Polish land targets and to destroy the Polish air force. The peacetime airfields were bombed throughout the first two days of the war, and the training and civilian aircraft and repair units still there were severely damaged. The road and rail network, and administrative and industrial centres were also attacked.

German air superiority was felt almost from the first day. Within five days it had destroyed half of the Polish Pursuit Brigade defending Warsaw, and the small Bomber Brigade used for reconnaissance and for attacks on armoured and motorised columns.

The Germans operated either with great brutality or with considerable inefficiency. Although written orders were issued for bombing military objectives, these operations were carried out with complete disregard for the civilian population, and the countryside around military targets was bombed mercilessly, as were columns of evacuees on the roads.

The frontier battles

From the first day of fighting four distinct frontier battles developed. German infantry and armour attacked the Krakow Army in the Silesian-Slovak corner, the Lodz Army near Czestochowa, the Pomorze Army units

in Pomerania, and the Modlin Army near the East Prussia frontier.

Silesia-Slovakia: As early as September 1 a strong German armoured force, consisting of the II and IV Panzer Light Divisions, struck the weak KOP in the Slovak sector, but was halted when the Polish GOC, General Szylling, brought up his sole reserve, Colonel Maczek's motorised brigade. In the centre the V Panzer Division caused the 6th Infantry Division to retreat in disorder, and on the northern flank the German II and III Light Divisions smashed the Krakow Cavalry Brigade at Wozniki and threatened to cut off the 7th Infantry Division defending Czestochowa. Thus the German XIV Army and part of the X Army began their encircling movement which forced the Krakow Army to retreat back to the line of the Dunajec and Nida rivers. In the process the Polish 7th Division capitulated. *continued on page 24*



Ullstein

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Hofmann

Panzers (left) ford a river near Tarnow
German soldiers (far left) cross the frontier into Poland



(Far left) Target Warsaw: view of a raid on the Polish capital. (Left) Stukas 'peeling off' for an attack. (Below left) A downed Polish aircraft



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(Far left) German infantry take cover during the assault on Warsaw. (Left) Tanks and troops block this exit from the city

The Campaign that was over in 36 days

- September 1:** Poland is invaded by German troops at 0445 hours.
- September 2:** The Luftwaffe gains air superiority over Poland.
- September 5:** German troops cross the Vistula river.
- September 9:** The IV Panzer Division reaches Warsaw.
- September 9/15:** The Polish army counterattacks against the German flank at the Bzura river.
- September 11:** German troops cross the San river.
- September 17:** The Red Army invades eastern Poland.
- September 22:** The Red Army occupies Lwow.
- September 23:** German troops withdraw to the demarcation line agreed with Russia, while Polish troops fight their way towards Rumania and Hungary.
- September 24:** 1,150 German aircraft bomb Warsaw.
- September 27:** Warsaw surrenders.
- October 1:** After heavy fighting, the defence of the Polish coast ends. The Polish naval commander surrenders.
- October 6:** Last Polish troops cease fighting.



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△ End of a short campaign: in an OKW train, Polish representatives discuss the terms of surrender with German General Blaskowitz ▽ At the front, German troops rejoice at the news of Warsaw's surrender



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The Polish Defence (continued)

lated, and into the widening gap between the Krakow and Lodz Armies the Germans threw five mechanised divisions with the spearhead aimed towards Deblin

Czestochowa: The main German forces, the VIII Army and the bulk of the X Army, wheeled north against the Lodz Army. The IV Panzer Division attacked the Wolynska Cavalry Brigade on the southern flank and the battle raged for two days before the Poles were forced to withdraw, in good order but with heavy losses which included half their artillery. Because of their strong defence the Poles had also delayed the advance of the I Panzer Division.

Pomerania: At the start of the battle in Pomerania, on September 1, the double bridge over the Vistula at Tczew, vital to German troop movement to East Prussia, was blown up. The Pomorze Army stood near the frontier and advanced units were attacked on the western bank of the Vistula. In one action a German infantry column was taken completely by surprise when it was charged by the mounted horsemen of the Polish 18th Lancer Regiment. However, when a group of German armoured cars appeared on the flank they were forced to withdraw, suffering heavy casualties.

Advance through a forest

Instead of moving towards Bydgoszcz, the German armoured and motorised forces advanced through the primeval Tuchola Forest towards Chelmno, completely surprising the Poles, who considered the forest impassable for mechanised units and had therefore neglected to cover the route. This action cut off the retreat of the Poles, and the bulk of the 9th Infantry Division and of the Pomeranian Cavalry Brigade were thrown back to the north, where they fought bravely against the encircling forces until they were finally destroyed.

East Prussia: The fourth frontier battle was waged north of Warsaw near the East Prussian frontier, when the German III Army, with five infantry divisions, one cavalry brigade, and one Panzer division, attacked the Modlin Army. One Polish infantry division and two cavalry brigades, defending a fortified position in the Mlawa area, put up a strong resistance against great German superiority for three days, under the command of Lieutenant-General Przedzimirski, who ordered the withdrawal towards Modlin only after the Germans had partly breached the position and outflanked its eastern wing.

Forced retreat

On September 4 and 5 a battle was fought on the prepared line of defence along the rivers Warta and Widawka. The Lodz Army was to hold that line, at least until the Poznan and Pomorze Armies withdrew to take up positions alongside it. Four infantry divisions and one cavalry brigade fought seven German divisions, strengthened by the motorised regiment SS Standarte 'Adolf Hitler', and after two days of bitter fighting a crisis developed on the northern wing of the Lodz Army, whose commander reported to the High Command: 'The 10th Division has fallen to pieces . . . we are leaving the Warta-Widawka line which

could not be held . . . the situation is grave . . .'

It was a forced retreat and the Commander-in-Chief had no option but to confirm the decision and order the withdrawal to the Vistula line, which began on the night of September 5.

In the centre of the Polish front nothing was happening, and the GOC of the unengaged Poznan Army, General Kutrzeba, submitted to the C-in-C a proposal to relieve the heavy fighting of the Lodz Army by a counterattack against the northern flank of the German forces. He received the reply: 'The intention of the C-in-C is that your army should reach as soon as possible the basic line of defence and you are to do everything you can towards that end.'

Critical situation

Meanwhile, on September 3, German troops approached Bydgoszcz but encountered tough resistance from the 15th Polish Infantry Division. In the town itself a critical situation developed when the small but well-organised German civilian minority attempted to seize power by force, and although the only troops in the town were from transport units and depots, the uprising was in fact soon quashed by the Polish civilian population.

On the right bank of the Vistula Polish troops defended their positions east of Grudziadz for three days against the German XXI Corps, but by the evening of September 3 it was obvious that the Pomorze Army had suffered a heavy defeat in the Corridor.

General Bortnowski reported to the C-in-C: 'The situation is such that all the cut-off units must be regarded as lost . . . Perhaps something will be found . . . In connection with this situation I feel it my duty to put myself at your disposal, Marshal. I accept the blame and ask you to deal with my case at any time you wish.' But Marshal Rydz-Smigly replied: 'General, it's too bad . . . Nothing can be undone, but we must hold out. We shall have to face more than one bad experience. We shall have to hold out, and we shall.'

The C-in-C ordered the immediate deep withdrawal of the Pomorze Army. This took place during September 4 and 5, surprisingly without enemy interference as the German IV Army moved, not as anticipated through Bydgoszcz to Warsaw, but across the Vistula into East Prussia, following the German plan for an encirclement of all the Polish forces.

Because of communication difficulties, the Modlin Army retreat did not begin until September 4, and in the daylight the retreating troops were exposed to concentrated air attacks which disorganised many units. Then, on September 5, the pressure unexpectedly eased as the Germans, pursuing their plan of deep encirclement, moved further to the east to cross the river Narew near Pultusk and Rozan at the rear of the Polish capital.

The Polish High Command soon realised that the tempo of operations dictated by the enemy was to be much faster than had been foreseen, and on September 5 all army commanders received the general order of retreat to the Vistula line.

The following morning the Germans began a rapid movement to the Vistula in an attempt to take advantage of the gaps between the Polish armies. The Panzer and motorised units sped forward, without paying much attention to their flanks,

crushing and by-passing defended positions. Their object was to seize the bridges over the Vistula, or at least block the way to them against the Polish forces. The Germans knew that the Vistula was neither fortified nor guarded by Polish troops, so they took the risk of spreading their forces on a wide front from Sandomierz to Warsaw. The mechanised formations were followed by the German infantry mass which lagged far behind—an arrangement which led to increasing difficulties in supply, particularly of fuel.

As the Germans moved towards the Vistula the Poles were retreating towards the bridges. The Germans did not know that north of the Bzura the Poznan Army was reaching the region of Kutno, and the Pomorze Army was recovering from the fighting in the Corridor and was marching southwards in good order. These two armies represented a force of ten infantry divisions and two and one-half cavalry brigades.

The German staffs mistook evacuation transports from Pomerania and western Poland for military transports, and believed that the Poznan Army must be somewhere near Warsaw—a surprising mistake since the Luftwaffe had actually reported great concentrations of Polish troops north of the Bzura.

Crowded roads

The conditions of the Polish retreat were extremely difficult. The troops were spread along a 200-mile front from Torun to south-east of Radom, and their front line was most uneven and unfavourable in relation to the line of their 'last stand' on the mid-Vistula. The German Panzer mass was only 75 miles from Warsaw, whereas the Pomorze, Poznan, and Lodz Armies all had to cover between 100 and 125 miles. The Lodz Army had the added hazard of having to cross in front of the Panzer force. The roads, crowded with supply columns and fleeing civilians, were often bombarded by the Luftwaffe, making the organisation of food and ammunition supplies almost impossible.

Simultaneously with the race to the Vistula the Germans began to exert great pressure on the extreme wings of the Polish front. In the south the German XIV Army attacked the Krakow Army and forced it across the Dunajec river. The German army then moved its armour quickly into the gap made when the Karpaty Army was forced to retreat to the San river before the Krakow Army had crossed the Dunajec.

On the northern wing the German III Army struck at the reserve group Wyszkw, in the Rozan area, and because of a misunderstanding of orders Rozan was evacuated, allowing the Germans to seize the crossing there and penetrate deep into the Polish front. This move cut off the Narew Group from the Modlin Army, and when an order from the Polish High Command for the Narew Group to withdraw did not arrive, the group remained on the Narew line, cut off from its neighbour and in a dangerous forward position.

From Bzura to Russian invasion

On September 6 the Polish High Command issued the final orders for the general withdrawal to the Narew-Vistula-San line. During the night the government left Warsaw for the Luck-Krzemieniec district and the High Command was evacuated to Brzesko on the Bug river. By the following



‘On September 5 our corps had a surprise visit from Adolf Hitler. I met him near Plevno on the Tuchel-Schwetz road, got into his car, and drove with him along the line of our previous advance. We passed the destroyed Polish artillery, went through the Schwetz, and then, following closely behind our encircling troops, drove to Graudenz, where he stopped and gazed for some time at the blown bridges over the Vistula. At the sight of the smashed artillery regiment, Hitler had asked me: “Our dive-bombers did that?” When I replied, “No, our Panzers!” he was plainly astonished’

Panzer General Heinz Guderian

[from *The War*, edited by Desmond Flower and James Reeves, published by Michael Joseph Ltd.]



The Polish Defence (continued)

evening it was clear that the Narew line could no longer be held and on the northern wing the defence was moved to the Bug line. Later it became clear that defence of the Narew line in the north and the San line in the south was impossible with German armour reaching the crossings.

In that perilous situation, one factor still offered the Poles a chance of success. In the centre of the German disposition the armoured and motorised divisions were far ahead of the infantry and largely immobile through lack of fuel, and when Lieutenant-General Kutrzeba, on September 8, submitted for the third time his proposal for a counterattack by the Poznan and Pomorze Armies against the German flank, it was approved.

Striking back

On September 9 the Poznan Army struck from the Bzura river towards the south-east, with the Pomorze Army marching behind its east wing. At first the Germans paid little attention to the attack. As late as the evening of September 9 the German General Blaskowitz ordered divisions of the VIII Army to continue to the Vistula, but next morning they were frantically recalled to the Bzura. Only during the night of September 10/11 did General der Artillerie von Reichenau direct three divisions of his X Army towards the Bzura.

In the first phase of the battle, from September 9 to 12, three divisions of the Poznan Army, covered on both flanks by cavalry brigades, shattered the German XXX Infantry Division, which was covering the Bzura on a wide front, and pushed back three divisions of the German VIII Army before reinforcements from the X Army arrived. On September 12, Lieutenant-General Kutrzeba received news that the Lodz Army was retreating towards Modlin. Realising that there was now no question of co-operation from them, and that his two armies would be cut off from Warsaw, he called off further attacks and decided to regroup his troops for a move directly to the east, to fight through to the capital.

Two divisions of the Pomorze Army were ordered to cover the regrouping by an attack in the direction of Skierniewice, which constituted the second phase of the Battle of the Bzura, from September 13 to 15, and succeeded in halting and partly repulsing two German divisions of the X Army which had just arrived as reinforcements.

Assault on Warsaw

Simultaneously with the beginning of the Battle of the Bzura, the IV Panzer Division, at 0700 hours on September 9, launched its first assault on the Polish capital, from the south-west. Strongly supported by heavy artillery, the German tanks reached the streets of Warsaw but were met with stubborn resistance from Major-General Czuma's troops. The civilian population took an active part in the fighting and the Germans were halted with severe losses.

After three hours General Reinhardt saw that the fighting could not be prolonged if his division was to remain an operational unit: one Panzer regiment which started the assault with 120 tanks had only 57 left in that short time. The division was ordered to retreat to its initial position. When the XVI Corps sent an order to renew the

German light artillery in action



German shock troops, ready for the attack, wait for an artillery barrage to lift

attack immediately, the division reported that this was absolutely impossible.

Despite the failure at the gates of Warsaw and the Polish action from the Bzura, the Germans did not change their intention of crossing the mid-Vistula, on the whole width between Sandomierz and Warsaw, and striking towards Lublin. Apart from being forced to lay siege to Warsaw from the west, the Germans had to deal with the Polish troops still trying to break through to the eastern bank of the Vistula.

On the river, only the I Panzer Division managed to build a small bridgehead in the eastern bank at Gora Kalwaria, where it was constantly attacked from Warsaw, which had become the centre of a determined resistance. In the southern sector the V Panzer Division destroyed the bridge south of Sandomierz but was halted at the town. The Krakow Army, with no communications linking them with High Command, recaptured and rebuilt the damaged bridges, and when communications were restored, continued the retreat to the south-east.

To the north, troops of the Prusy Army were retreating in small groups. One large group, consisting of the 3rd, 12th, and 36th Infantry Divisions, was cut off at Ilza and destroyed. The rest fought on to the Vistula, waded across, and formed into new divisions. Only a fraction of the Lodz Army managed to reach Warsaw, the remainder pressing first towards Gora Kalwaria, then turning towards Warsaw, and finally, after bitter fighting almost at the gates of the city, withdrawing to the north and reaching Modlin on September 13 and 14.

The rearguards of the retreating Polish troops in the bend of the Vistula were now moving more slowly and beginning guerilla activities, which no doubt contributed to the postponement of the German offensive across the Vistula. But the decisive motive for this postponement was the situation on the Bzura.

Command reorganised

When the German view of the seriousness of the situation eventually changed, only one infantry regiment was left on the whole western periphery of Warsaw, the rest being diverted to the Bzura. During the night of September 12/13, and on September 14, the German chain of command was twice entirely reorganised, resulting in bringing all the troops in the battle under General von Rundstedt. All armoured and motorised troops from the Vistula line, except one division, were brought into the Bzura battle, and the assault across the Vistula was consequently reduced to a minimum, being carried out on September 13 between Deblin and Sandomierz by only the IV and XIV Infantry Divisions.

On the northern wing of the front the retreat of the Narew Group and the Modlin Army began during the night of September 9/10, and at the same time the Germans moved their northern pincer of the secondary encirclement which was to embrace all the Polish armed forces. Narew Group carried out a counterattack in the fork of the Bug and Narew rivers, inflicting heavy losses on the Kempf Panzer Division. However, the German XIX Corps appeared and after three days of stubborn fighting the Narew infantry were annihilated. In the same period the Modlin Army was engaged in bloody fighting against the bulk of the German III Army until, with heavy losses, it avoided the German armour in a retreat

towards the Wlodawa-Chelm area.

Surprisingly, they were not pressed by the Germans, who turned to the west to block the crossings over the Vistula and then attack Warsaw. The German III Army and part of the IV Army were sent to close on Modlin, to be temporarily held up, on September 13, by Polish cavalry.

On the southern wing of the Polish front, General Sosnkowski, now in command of the Krakow and Karpaty Armies, sent his forces to attack the I German Mountain Division near Lwow. Then, when Marshal Rydz-Smigly felt compelled to hasten the retreat to the south-east, General Sosnkowski's troops were ordered to cross the Dniestr as quickly as possible to organise the 'Rumanian bridgehead'—an order which never reached him, as he was cut off in Przemysl.

Bitter resistance

From September 15, German operations turned towards the centre of Poland, aiming to stop the Polish troops from the Bzura breaking through to Warsaw and then to liquidate the pocket of Bzura. Hitler abandoned his aim of capturing Warsaw. Instead, he called for capitulation, and although his demands were rejected, Warsaw was left out of operations except for its subjection to constant artillery fire.

Meanwhile, the Battle of the Bzura was ending. Some 328 tons of bombs dropped on the Polish troops initiated the last phase of the bitter and relentless fighting. Only two Polish brigades and remnants of the 25th and 15th Divisions were able to break through to Warsaw. The remaining troops were annihilated. Altogether, the Battle of the Bzura had occupied 29 German divisions and had considerably helped to reduce pressure on the rest of the front.

In the north, General Guderian's XIX Corps was meeting unexpected resistance from newly formed Polish units in the Polesie district. The psychosis of Panzer terror was rapidly losing its grip and local defence units caused the Germans painful losses. The advanced German wedges found themselves in a difficult position, dispersed over wide open spaces, with long lines of communication and no infantry support for their armour. Losses of equipment were substantial, fuel was scarce, and supplies were uncertain.

Attempted break-through

At this time, September 15 to 18, a new Polish 'Northern Front' was created under Lieutenant-General Dab-Biernacki in the Lublin-Chelm area. It consisted of remnants of the Prusy Army, the Modlin Army, and other groups, representing a nominal strength of ten infantry divisions. They had little contact with the enemy and the troops were able to get some rest until ordered to move to the Rumanian bridgehead through the area east of Lwow. Farther south, the Krakow Army was tying up considerable German forces between the lower San and Tomaszow Lubelski.

The first attempt to break through to the south-east by the 21st Infantry Division failed after a bloody fight with the German XLV Division. Between Przemysl and Lwow, General Sosnkowski, still without contact with High Command, pressed forward to the east and defeated the motorised SS Standarte 'Germania' Regiment, which tried to stop them on September 16.

News of this success spread in a rather exaggerated version and uplifted the morale of the Polish troops. In the meantime the Germans tried to encircle Lwow from all sides, but for the time being they lacked sufficient forces, while the Polish forces were increasing every day.

The Polish High Command in Kolomyja was mainly concerned with organising the Rumanian bridgehead, which was to be held until the troops of General Sosnkowski and of Lieutenant-Generals Piskor and Dab-Biernacki arrived. But General Sosnkowski's troops were still marching towards Lwow instead of to the bridgehead, and contact with him was not re-established until September 17.

Despite the many difficulties and heart-breaking experiences of the past 16 days, the High Command was facing the future not without hope. Next day, September 17, the great offensive of the Western Allies was expected to start, and although the offensive was postponed a little, nobody worried. After all, a few days would not matter: soon the Germans would be forced to withdraw from Poland at least the majority of the Luftwaffe and the Panzer divisions, and then . . . we shall see.

The German High Command issued on September 15 the order to cut off the Poles from Rumania, but the troop movements involved were not carried out because the units were either fighting or lacked sufficient fuel.

Enter Russia

Just before dawn on September 17, the Red Army crossed the border into Poland along its whole length of 800 miles, from the Dzwina to the Dniestr. The Polish government and High Command, and indeed the German High Command, were taken completely by surprise.

The Soviet's two army groups were the White-Ruthenian and the Ukrainian, the first consisting of four armies and the second of three. The most southern XII Army had the most mechanised formations, as its task was to cut off the Poles from Rumania and Hungary. The Polish frontier was guarded solely by 18 battalions and five cavalry squadrons of the KOP, and it was not surprising that during the first two days, September 17 and 18, Soviet spearheads penetrated some 60 miles into Poland. The Red Army's attitude to Polish troops was ambiguous. At first it seemed that Soviet troops avoided fighting, and it was even rumoured that they had come to help the Poles, but the situation soon became clear when Polish units were disarmed and taken prisoner.

Rumanian sympathy

The Polish High Command was immediately endangered as the Soviet army crossed the Dniestr and threatened Kolomyja. There was no time for prolonged discussion. Orders were issued to all troops to retreat towards the Rumanian and Hungarian borders, to resist the Germans but not to fight the Russians unless they attacked or tried to disarm them. It was decided that the President and government would proceed through Rumania to France, and when the Rumanian government took a sympathetic stand the Commander-in-Chief also decided to cross into Rumania. However, the next day, September 18, they were all interned and transported to inner Rumania, as the Rumanian government gave way to German pressure.



Heinrich Hoffman

Polish POWs, caught in the German pincer movement

Colonel Adam Sawczynski sums up the end of the campaign

With the entry of Soviet troops into Poland the fight became hopeless, although resistance still continued. The aim was now only to get as many troops as possible out of the country to continue the fight at the side of the Allies. German and Soviet troops concentrated on cutting off the Polish retreat to Rumania and Hungary, and as they met on the upper Dniestr on September 20, only those Polish troops on or near the Rumanian bridgehead managed to get across the border. In all, 30,000 Polish soldiers and airmen reached Rumania, and 60,000 crossed into Hungary. In the north, Soviet troops pushed about 15,000 Polish soldiers to the Lithuanian and Latvian borders. In the centre, the Germans tried to beat the Soviets to Lwow, failed—and then later did not succeed in securing Lwow and its oilfields in exchange for Lithuania.

In the final agreement on September 28 the frontier was moved from the Vistula to the Bug, and in the south it remained on the San. In the meantime the Polish troops from the Chelm-Lublin area and from eastern Malopolska were trying to fight through to the Hungarian frontier, but their endeavours were foiled and they were forced to capitulate, some to German

and some to Soviet troops.

Warsaw, to which part of General Kutrzeba's forces managed to break through, was repulsing German attacks and trying to help the troops fighting their way through to the capital. But on September 25 the Germans began the decisive assault. During September 26 and 27, with strong air and artillery support, they attacked on all sectors on both sides of the Vistula. The attacks were mainly repulsed, but with food and ammunition running out, Warsaw was forced to capitulate. On September 29 Modlin followed suit.

Fighting on the Baltic and Polish shores ended on October 1, when the Polish naval commander surrendered. The fighting on land had been particularly bloody, with an extremely gallant Polish resistance. Of the Polish navy, two submarines managed after many adventures to escape to Britain.

Germany had a marked superiority over Poland in all respects. The geographical outline of the border gave them a superior deployment and permitted a two-sided encirclement; they also had overwhelming superiority in the air. They had all the usual advantages of the aggressor; choice of moment and points of action, time for preparations, and the psychological superiority of the side which has the initiative. They possessed a well-organised fifth column, had the assurance of Soviet co-operation, and even the fine weather was their ally.

General Walther K. Nehring sums up the end of the campaign

On September 22 a combined Russo-German parade of high-speed units was staged at Brest Litovsk before Generals Guderian and Kriwoschein, and at the following banquet Kriwoschein proposed a toast 'to the eternal enmity of our two countries'. He had inadvertently made a symbolic mistake by confusing the words *Freundschaft* ('amity') and *Feindschaft* ('enmity'), which sounds similar to Russian ears.

Despite the bravery and stubborn resistance of the Polish troops the campaign

had been surprisingly rapid and decisive. Left in the lurch by her allies, Poland could only go under. The new German army and command had well proved themselves, and had been effectively supported by the new German air force. The tank units themselves had withstood the practical test in combat and proved excellent, fulfilling the great expectations of their creator.

The results of the four-week campaign were truly amazing. It had opened up a promised land in which the entire population had been defeated. The number of prisoners taken amounted to 700,000; by comparison, although they included 10,000 killed, German casualties were small.

This brilliant campaign, however,

It must be fully realised that the use of mechanisation and air forces in great masses was at this time a novelty, and their operational efficiency surprised even the Germans. The rate of movement hitherto accepted for military operations, 15 miles in 24 hours, was now multiplied several times. German superiority was total, and they were able to give the campaign a lightning speed at comparatively small cost.

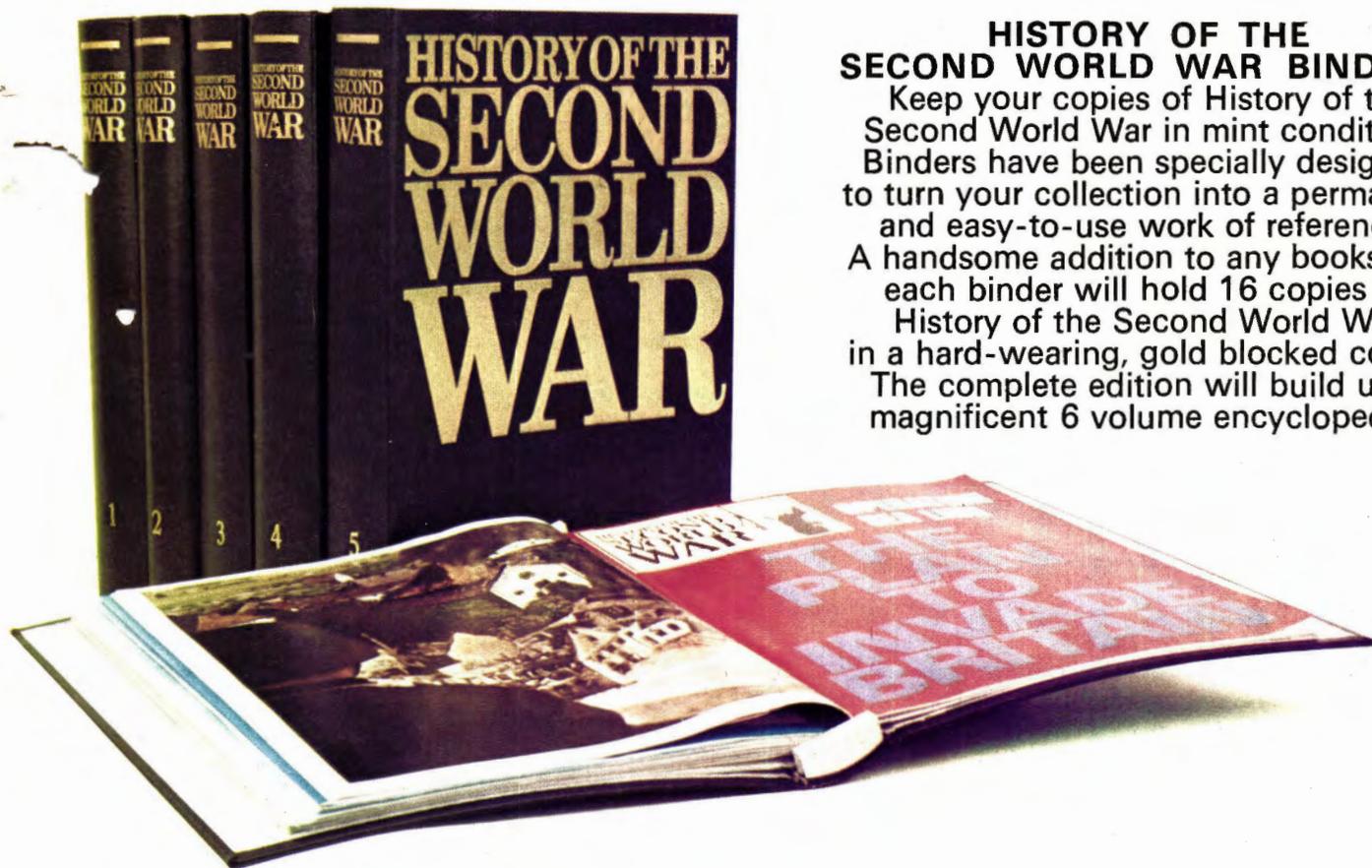
German casualties, according to their October 1939 estimates, were 8,082 killed, 27,279 wounded, and 5,029 missing, although the final figures were slightly higher. Polish casualties cannot be accurately assessed, but were much higher and included civilians.

German tank losses were 217 destroyed and large numbers damaged, and the Luftwaffe lost 285 aircraft destroyed and 279 damaged beyond repair, in all about 25% of the aircraft used. Poland lost 284 aircraft in combat and 149 from other reasons.

For the Western Allies, the September campaign's results were twofold. They gave a true picture of the new countenance of war, and left eight months of valuable time to prepare proper defensive measures in the new circumstances. As is now known, the West took no advantage of these experiences, except for Great Britain, whose air defence during those eight months was expanded before the start of the Battle of Britain.

produced one great future disadvantage. Hitler, who was militarily uninitiated, overestimated the impressive result, as well as his part in it. His experience of the campaign was wholly from the outside, and since he lacked the ability to penetrate the depths of problems of command and solve their inherent difficulties, his judgement remained superficial and later led to frequent false conclusions. Above all he believed that he could, by pressing a button, operate the army as a machine which would accomplish the same results no matter what conditions prevailed—an illusion which was to lead to serious misunderstandings between Hitler and his experienced Commander-in-Chief and General Staff.

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Next Issue: The Graf Spee

For nearly three months one of the most powerful ships afloat, the pocket-battleship **Graf Spee**, was at large in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. She had created havoc with the vital maritime commerce of Britain and France, but at dawn on December 13 she fell in with three British cruisers. There followed one of the epic naval engagements of the Second World War.



Part 2 of the *History of the Second World War* will be on sale in two weeks time.