Austria and Czechoslovakia Fall

Nov. 5, 1937-Hitler met with his military staff

He boldly declared that for Germany to grow & prosper, it must absorb Austria (his home country) & Czechoslovakia into the 3rd Reich

When advisors remarked his plan might lead to war, the Fuehrer replied that the “German Question” could only be solved by force

The use of force, he said, is never without risk
Union With Austria-The Anschluss

After World War I, the Paris Peace Conference created the small nation of Austria from what was left of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Most of Austria’s 6-million people were Germans who favored unification with Germany.

Mar. 12, 1938-German troops marched into Austria unopposed.

The US & the rest of the world did nothing.
Bargaining for the Sudetenland

Hitler then turned to Czechoslovakia, where 3-million Germans lived in an area called the Sudetenland. This mountain region formed Czechoslovakia’s main defense against German attack. Sept., 1938 - Hitler made up the charge that the Czechs were abusing the Sudeten Germans, & began massing troops along the border.
The Munich Peace Conference

France & Britain promised to protect Czechoslovakia

Just when war seemed inevitable, Hitler invited French premier Daladier & British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain to talk peace

Both leaders flew to Munich, where the Fuehrer declared Czechoslovakia would be his “last territorial demand”
“Peace in Our Time”

In their eagerness to avoid war, both Daladier & Chamberlain chose to believe Hitler

Sept. 30, 1938-They signed the Munich Agreement, which turned the Sudetenland over to Germany without firing a shot

A satisfied Chamberlain returned home, waving the agreement, “I believe it is peace in our time”
A Shameful Policy

Chamberlain’s main political rival, Winston Churchill, was convinced Hitler would not stop until he had enslaved all of Europe. He called it a shameful policy of “appeasement” - giving up principles to pacify an aggressor. Churchill bluntly put it: “Britain & France had to choose between war & dishonor. They chose dishonor. They will have war.”
There Goes the Rest of Czechoslovakia

Mar. 15, 1939-Hitler showed that he had lied to the world by sending German troops to take over the rest of Czechoslovakia. Now the Fuehrer turned his attention toward Germany’s eastern neighbor, Poland.
Threatening Poland

Like Czechoslovakia, Poland had a sizeable German-speaking population.

Spring, 1939—Hitler began accusing the Poles of mistreating Germans & threatened Poland.

By now, Britain & France realized they had been duped & now prepared to defend Poland.

Hitler realized that would create a 2-front war—the same mistake that had exhausted Germany in World War I.
The USSR Declares Its Neutrality

As tensions rose over Poland, Stalin surprised everyone by signing a non-aggression pact with Hitler. The two had been bitter enemies, but on Aug. 23, 1939, fascist Germany & communist Soviet Union promised never to attack each other. They also signed a secret pact agreeing to divide Poland between them. The danger of Germany fighting a 2-front war was thus eliminated, & Poland’s days were numbered.
Blitzkrieg in Poland

Sept. 1, 1939-The German air force, or Luftwaffe, roared over Poland, raining bombs on military targets & cities. German tanks raced across the countryside, spreading confusion & terror. This new strategy was called “blitzkrieg,” or lightning war. It made use of the latest technology of fast tanks, powerful airplanes, surprise, & overwhelming force.
Britain & France Declare War

Two days following the German invasion of Poland, Britain & France declared war on Germany.

The blitzkrieg tactics worked perfectly—Poland was overrun in just three weeks.

During the last week of fighting, the Soviet Union attacked Poland from the east, grabbing some of its territory.

Germany now held 2/3rds of Poland, which ceased to exist—and the world was now at war.
The Phony War

French & British troops hunkered down on the Maginot Line, a series of forts along France’s eastern border.

They sat staring into Germany, waiting over the entire winter of 1939-1940 for the Germans to attack—the Germans stared back.

Newspapers called the lack of action “the phony war.”
The Real Fighting Begins

After occupying eastern Poland, Stalin took over the Baltic nations of Estonia, Latvia, & Lithuania.

In late 1939, he attacked Finland—& after 3 months fighting, the Finns surrendered.

Suddenly, on April 9, 1940, Hitler launched a surprise invasion of Denmark & Norway in order “to protect those countries.”
The Attack on France

The German plan-built a ring of bases in Norway & Denmark from which to attack Britain. Their plan also included lulling France into expecting an attack on the Maginot Line.

May, 1940-Germans marched into the Netherlands, Belgium, & Luxemburg, setting the stage for an end-run around the French. German tanks raced thru the Ardennes forest in Belgium then turned south to surround Paris.
The Miracle of Dunkirk

The German offensive trapped almost 400,000 British & French troops as they fled to Dunkirk.

The German army was set to destroy this army, but Hitler made a mistake—Luftwaffe chief Herman Goering wanted his men to get some glory, too.

While Goering tried to bomb the trapped men into surrender, the British assembled a makeshift fleet of small boats.

Some 800 vessels carried nearly all the Allied troops to safety in Britain, to fight another day.
The Fall of France

The British Parliament replaced Chamberlain with Winston Churchill.

A few days later, Italy entered the war on Hitler’s side & invaded France from the south.

The Germans closed in on Paris from the north.

June, 22, 1940-In a rail car at Compiegne, Hitler handed French officers his terms of surrender.

Germany would occupy northern France, while a Nazi-controlled government under Marshal Petain was set up at Vichy in the south.
The Battle of Britain

Summer, 1940-Now that France had fallen, Hitler assembled an invasion fleet along the French coast, intending to invade England.

At the same time, Germany launched an air war by bombing British military targets.

Hitler’s goal: destroy the Royal Air Force-& he had 2600 planes at his disposal.

Aug. 15, 1940-some 2000 planes began bombing Britain every night.
So Much Owed by So Many to So Few

Night after night, German planes pounded British targets-mostly airfields
Then they switched to bombing cities-a mistake
Without daily German bombing of their airfields, the RAF fought back brilliantly
With a new device called radar, British pilots accurately plotted the flight paths of German planes, even in darkness
Sept. 15, 1940-The RAF shot down over 185 German planes, while losing only 26 aircraft

Six weeks later, Hitler called off the invasion

Prime Minister Churchill said of the RAF, that “Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few”

German bombers kept pounding Britain’s cities—but the British also began bombing German cities

But Britain stood alone against the German war machine
World War II Begins

1938
- March, 1938: Germany annexes Austria-the Anschluss

1938
- Sept., 1938: Germany annexes Czecho-slovakia

1939
- Munich Conference, Sept., 1938
- Germany annexes Czecho-slovakia, March, 1939
- Germany attacks Poland, Sept. 1939
- The Phony War

1940
- Aug., 1938: Germany & USSR sign non-aggression pact
- June, 1940: France surrenders
- Aug. 1940: Battle of Britain

1941
World War II Begins