

Hitler's Actions

Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany in January 1933. Almost immediately he began secretly building up Germany's army and weapons. In 1934 he increased the size of the army, began building warships and created a German airforce. Compulsory military service was also introduced.

Although Britain and France were aware of Hitler's actions, they were also concerned about the rise of Communism and believed that a stronger Germany might help to prevent the spread of Communism to the West.



In 1936 Hitler ordered German troops to enter the Rhineland. At this point the German army was not very strong and could have been easily defeated. Yet neither France nor Britain was prepared to start another war.

Hitler also made two important alliances during 1936. The first was called the Rome-Berlin Axis Pact and allied Hitler's Germany with Mussolini's Italy. The second was called the Anti-Comintern Pact and allied Germany with Japan.



Hitler's next step was to begin taking back the land that had been taken away from Germany. In March 1938, German troops marched into Austria. The Austrian leader was forced to hold a vote asking the people whether they wanted to be part of Germany.

The results of the vote were fixed and showed that 99% of Austrian people wanted Anschluss (union with Germany). The Austrian leader asked Britain, France and Italy for aid. Hitler promised that Anschluss was the end of his expansionist aims and not wanting to risk war, the other countries did nothing.

Hitler did not keep his word and six months later demanded that the Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia be handed over to Germany.



Neville Chamberlain, Prime Minister of Britain, met with Hitler three times during September 1938 to try to reach an agreement that would prevent war. The Munich Agreement stated that Hitler could have the Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia provided that he promised not to invade the rest of Czechoslovakia.

The picture (left) shows Chamberlain returning from Munich with the document signed by Hitler declaring 'Peace in our time.'

Hope that there would be peace was short lived. Hitler was not a man of his word and in March 1939 invaded the rest of Czechoslovakia. Despite calls for help from the Czechoslovak government, neither Britain nor France was prepared to take military action against Hitler. However, some action was now necessary and believing that Poland would be Hitler's next target, both Britain and France promised that they would take military action against Hitler if he invaded Poland. Chamberlain believed that, faced with the prospect of war against Britain and France, Hitler would stop his aggression. Chamberlain was wrong. German troops invaded Poland on 1st September 1939.

