

NEVILLE J'AIME-BERLIN'S PIECE POLICY

I. Jo's Boy

A. The Second Son Also Rises

Chamberlain was the wrong man for Prime Minister in rough international seas.

Old Joe Chamberlain's two sons had divided the old man's inheritance ---

Austen was the one who cared about empire

Neville, the one who cared about cleaning out Birmingham's drains...
and, like his father, mayor

For thirty years, Austen was marked as the Chosen one.

... anointed to succeed his father, even in Jo's lifetime

... an irresistible pick in any Tory Cabinet

He even had Dad's monocle.

If you'd put money on the Prime Minister someday, you'd have bet on
Austen – Jo would have bet the bank. But you'd have been wrong.

It was only over time that people noticed something missing –

Maybe that instinct for the jugular....

Others muscled their way to the front, and Austen let
them.

He was stiff and proud, but he wasn't arrogant.
"Always played the game, and always lost it," one
contemporary sneered.

There were two differences with Jo.

Jo. would have changed the rules, if it looked like
he was about to lose the game.

For a genteel knee to the groin, there was nobody like
Jo. Chamberlain.

Neville was the Other Son.

... the one who never could get his father's love, or even his attention.

... tongue-tied, shy, afraid of old Jo, and never expected to make good.

... oh, for *him*, a business career would be good enough.

But it wasn't good enough. Neville Chamberlain had no flash – no monocle.

His half-brother tried to look like Dad.

Neville grew a mustache, and hugged the shadows.

Yet in the end, he had his father's grit – and a lot more of his father's
ruthlessness than he ever got credit for.

It would be he, not Austen, who made Prime Minister.

He had come to politics late. He was nearly fifty when he entered Parliament.

But there was no question about his talent.

He worked hard, and as Minister of Health, had plenty of very good ideas.

At every Cabinet meeting, you could depend on Chamberlain to have done his homework.

He dressed like a gentleman should...

The old fashioned starched wing-collars
Black jacket, striped trousers

But most of all, that umbrella, which, since the days of Louis-Philippe, was the symbol of upper middle class respectability.¹

The one time he lost his temper was when his umbrella got broken.

That tall, spare figure, dark-eyed and glacial in manner, had all the dignity that his brother and father LOOKED like they had, with their monocles on.

¹ Piers Brendon, **The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s** (New York: Knopf, 2000), 610.

He couldn't slap backs – and wouldn't have wanted to.

He couldn't compromise, and just about never had to.

He was a hard working, determined man –

with a clear, well-ordered mind – the kind that stays cleared by
throwing away everything it doesn't think it ever will need
to use again.

condescending to colleagues, contemptuous of critics

loftily disdainful of those who didn't agree with him
and unable to listen to arguments that went against his own

It was the arrogance of a first-rate mind, in what would have been a
first-rate second-string statesman.

But he knew little about the world outside.

America was “a nation of cads”

Russia was “semi-Asiatic”

The French “could not keep a secret for more than half an hour,
nor a government for more than nine months.”²

² Piers Brendon, **The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s** (New York: Knopf, 2000), 610.

He came to 10 Downing Street, still thinking like a Chancellor of Exchequer, about tight budgets and trim spending.

Having spent a life negotiating between employers and workers, he thought he could handle foreign policy the same way.

England could sit down for talks with Italy and Germany.
A fair bit of give and take would settle all differences.

B. Neville-Neville Land

If anything, time had made him less tolerant, less flexible.

Every critic was misled by “Jewish-Communist propaganda.”

The Prime Minister tapped their phones.

He muzzled parliamentary debate.

The Labor opposition got nothing but contempt.

Conservative back benchers were bullied.³

³ Piers Brendon, **The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s** (New York: Knopf, 2000), 611. And why not, when his own sister wore a Fascist badge and was his unofficial go-between with Mussolini?

To do in his enemies, he managed and manipulated the press –
planted stories reflecting on their sanity or integrity –
helped along a coterie of apologists who saw Jewish conspiracies
behind every criticism of Germany –
and made sure that the Government leaked no information that
would keep the public from seeing matters its own way.

He was thin skinned and could be very petty.
To survive around him, you had to tell him what he wanted to
hear.

Mediocrities and yes-men dotted his Cabinet.

Sir John Simon, lawyer and turncoat Liberal, who
someone once called a snake in snake's
clothing.

... sat on the fence so long that the iron entered
into his soul.

Sir Samuel Hoare of the Home Office, who
“passed from experience to experience, like
Boccaccio's virgin, without discernible
effect upon his condition.”

Sir Thomas Inskip, Minister for Coordination of
Defence, a talentless, ineffective man,
and like Hoare, very good at not understanding

what was going on in the world.

“He could look with frank and fearless gaze
at any prospect, however appalling –
and fail to see it.”⁴

Sir Horace Wilson, who always played for safety

Sir Kingsley Wood, who, when the war began, was
against bombing the Germans’ munitions
works because they were private property.

Men like those couldn’t have stopped Chamberlain’s appeasement policy,
even if they wanted to. And they didn’t want to.

A bright, apt man with a mind of his own was the last thing Chamberlain
wanted in his Cabinet....

No Churchill for him –

And, as soon as he could get rid of him, no Anthony Eden, either.

This wasn’t a weak man. It was a strong one, and a strong Prime Minister
with an autocratic strength.

That was exactly what made his ideas so dangerous. He couldn’t be
stopped, couldn’t be slowed.

⁴ Piers Brendon, **The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s** (New York: Knopf, 2000), 611.

C. The Search for a Lasting Settlement

By 1937, Churchill could speak for millions when he said:

“We seem to be moving, drifting, steadily, against our will – against the will of every race and every people and every class – towards some hideous catastrophe. Everybody wishes to stop it, but they do not know how.”⁵

Neville Chamberlain’s power came from the fact that he did know how – or thought he did.

He set out to stop that drift, but not in the Churchillian way.

England wasn’t ready for war.

And war didn’t have to happen – not if it could come to terms with Italy and Germany.

⁵ Robert Rhodes James, **Churchill: A Study in Failure, 1900-1939** (New York: World Publishing Co., 1970), 355.

Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler were like any other politicians:
they were reasonable men.

Reasonable men don't want war.

Reasonable men know that a deal or a treaty, once made,
has to be honored – or you can never expect
to work out differences in the future.

And Chamberlain, with a tidy Empire-fixed mind, knew the one treat that
he could give Hitler, that would make him give up his tricks...

the old German colonies lost in the war.

What an incentive to behave at home – lebensraum in the tropics!

(What Chamberlain hadn't figured out was that Hitler hadn't
the slightest interest in colonies.)

All along, Chamberlain had wanted to go slow on re-arming.

As Chancellor of the Exchequer, it seemed a waste of money
and a budget-buster, to him.

Now, he had even more reasons for going slow.

If he could work out a deal – and he knew he could – because
he was, after all, the supremely capable and utterly
dependable head of the greatest empire in the world –

England wouldn't NEED more guns, tanks, planes,

and ships.

We have to see the clear shocks he faced, when he became Prime Minister.

... word from Canada that when it came to re-arming the Empire, England would be on its own

... word from South Africa that if a war broke out in central Europe, no matter who was to blame, England could do all its fighting by itself

... word from Australia that what with the Far East being menaced by Japan, the Dominions Down Under couldn't do a thing for England in a European war

... a Neutrality Act from America that pretty much slammed the door on England buying guns and war supplies there, if a crisis came.

This, then, was the complicated source of Appeasement:

1. an England years from a war footing
2. an Empire putting distance between itself and the Mother Country
3. a Prime Minister who knew his own mind

But that doesn't get away from the essential fact:

– if you are outgunned, GET THE GUNS YOU NEED.

And Chamberlain, as Chancellor of the Exchequer and as Prime Minister, didn't speed up rearmament.

He rationed it.

By his system, if one service got more money, it came out of the funds for another service.

Building up the RAF ... good idea.
But it was done by starving the army.

The system did this:

- it stopped cold, for over a year, any progress towards an army that was capable of fighting a war on the Continent
- it delayed for a year any moves to the Naval standard of having a force able to fight in two oceans at a time ...
 - to take on Italy in the Mediterranean, say –
 - and still protect the Empire in the Far East from Japan.
- it slimmed the money available for anti-aircraft artillery
 - It slowed down to a crawl the moves to prepare ground defenses against an air attack
- it slowed the building of airplanes from what it had been.⁶

So if decisions were made, because it was argued...

- England hasn't got the army to fight Germany with
- Germany has a stronger air force
- our cities are wide open to bomber raids

⁶ Telford Taylor, **Munich: The Price of Peace** (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1979), 997-998.

– getting involved in a war with Germany or Italy will cost us the whole Empire in the Far East...

Whoooooo's fault was that?

D. The Halifax

At his side, soon enough was Edward Wood, Earl of Halifax.

Halifax was a tall, aloof, very moral man.

He had plenty of courage and plenty more Christianity.⁷

His visit to Germany close to delusional.

He liked Goebbels.

Goering he found downright picturesque.

And what wonderful shooting you could do around his hunting-lodge!

(Halifax loved to go shooting).

When he got to Berchtesgaden, he almost mistook Hitler for a footman and very nearly handed him his hat and coat to put away.⁸

⁷ The latest work in special pleading – arguing that Halifax wasn't an appeaser except now and then, at crucial moments, but that at others, was a courageous opponent of appeasement – is Andrew Roberts, **“The Holy Fox”: A Biography of Lord Halifax** (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991).

⁸ Von Neurath had to hiss at him, “Der Fuhrer! Der Fuhrer!” Hitler apparently missed the mistake. See Andrew Roberts, **“The Holy Fox”: A Biography of Lord Halifax**, 70.

After that, he was bullied and blustered in the true Fuhrerian style.

He was told that the one way to handle India was to shoot Gandhi first, and then supporters of the Congress — dozens if possible, hundreds if need be.

Hitler told him how much he like the movie, *Lives of the Bengal Lancers*, which showed British soldiers in India giving it good and hard to the savage Wogs on the frontier.⁹

That's the way inferior races OUGHT to be treated.

In fact, he, Hitler, used that movie to teach the SS how to deal with untermenschen.

Halifax was immensely polite.

He assured Hitler that England wouldn't stand in the way if Germany interfered with Austria, or Danzig or Czechoslovakia – just as long as it was done in a peaceful way.

He allowed that freedom of the press was really a bad thing, what with all the mean things English papers said about Hitler, and promised to shut them up...

and kept his word, when he got home.¹⁰

⁹ Andrew Roberts, *"The Holy Fox": A Biography of Lord Halifax* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991), 67-74; Piers Brendon, *The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s* (New York: Knopf, 2000), 615.

¹⁰ Piers Brendon, *The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s* (New York: Knopf, 2000), 615-16.

Halifax left confident that his host really and truly wanted peace,
and was willing to deal.

In fact, he was really ... how could anyone else have
missed it! ... a man very much like Gandhi!!!

II. THE ROAD TO MUNICH

A. Anschluss

First came the absorption of Austria.

For any move into Czechoslovakia, it was a must.

It had vast gold reserves – and the Reich needed those, too.¹¹

It had no allies except Fascist Italy; and Mussolini wasn't about to
come to the rescue.

In the early 1930s, maybe.

Then he needed western coal, to keep running.

Only 23% of Italy's coal came from Germany.
Now, 64% did.

Germany was too vital to Italy's power to pick a quarrel with,
even one about Austria.¹²

¹¹ Laurence LaFore, **The End of Glory** (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1970), 200-01.

¹² Laurence LaFore, **The End of Glory** (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1970), 203-05.

By early 1938, it was made to take the fall.

This didn't provoke the uproar it might have.

Austria wasn't a model democracy. It was a leftover from the old Austro-Hungarian empire, the German-speaking fragment.

It had peace and toleration, and Vienna was one place where Jewish culture not only survived but flourished.

It kept a reputation for culture and good Christian morals.

But politically was another story.

In its best years, it had been priest-run and reactionary.

Hitler didn't have a thing to teach Austria about anti-Semitism.

Or dictatorship. By 1934 a sort of clerico-Fascist party ran the government.

They shot down striking workers and outlawed trade unions.¹³

Many Austrians wanted to be part of a larger Germany; and quite a lot of them were Nazis themselves.

They didn't much care for their dictator, Kurt von Schuschnigg.

Nobody much did. He had plenty of courage, but no warmth.

He was a cold, remote, reserved gentleman of 37.

¹³ Piers Brendon, **The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s** (New York: Knopf, 2000), 534.

In February 1938 the Fuhrer summoned Schuschnigg to Berchtesgaden and gave him a browbeating.

He must put Nazis in charge of the police and the army –
set Nazi political prisoners free –

and make his policies Germany's policies.

Austria wasn't quite being swallowed up – just told to put itself into the oven, toast itself to a golden brown and put itself on a serving-dish.¹⁴

Schuschnigg wasn't about to say no, and didn't have enough of an army to say "no" with.

His one chance of blocking an invasion was getting the Austrian people to put in their two cents worth.

He called a plebiscite. People would be invited to vote for him and for a free, independent, Christian, united, German Austria.

There wasn't much question how it would turn out.

Socialists, Communists, clericals, liberals, all rallied round the red-white & red flag.

They didn't have the votes, maybe. But Schuschnigg had the vote-counters, and that – as anybody from Florida could tell you – is all a candidate needs.¹⁵

¹⁴ Piers Brendon, **The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s** (New York: Knopf, 2000), 535-36; Gordon Brook-Shepherd, **The Anschluss** (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1963), 42-63.

Hitler moved fast. Schuschnigg was made to drop the plebiscite, or see Austria drown in a sea of blood.

He was forced out and a Nazi was put in charge.

His first act was to invite German troops in, across the border to protect law and order

Hitler hadn't planned it this way.

He'd wanted a Nazi Austria to ASK for annexation... that would forestall any need to send in troops.

It would be less explosive – less likely to cause an

¹⁵ Laurence LaFore, **The End of Glory** (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1970), 202-03.

international crisis.¹⁶

He needn't have worried.¹⁷

¹⁶ Laurence LaFore, **The End of Glory** (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1970), 203.

¹⁷ What if Schuschnigg had used troops to stand in Hitler's way? Could he have relied on the armed forces? Apparently, yes. Nazi sympathizers in the military were rare indeed. The army's morale was high; five thousand troops were fully mobilized and ready for action at a moment's notice, but a month before, the chief of staff had been confident that, given 48 hours to mobilize, Austria could have fielded 25,000 men, and five days more, 50,000 additional.

They could have put up a fight. But it wouldn't have been a winning fight. Artillery was in good shape, if a little old, though there were no tanks and no anti-aircraft defenses to speak of. As for bullets, Austria had just two days' supply. That would be just about how long it would have taken Hitler's army to march into Austria. Schuschnigg couldn't have won, not without foreign help, and that simply wasn't coming.

No, Austria couldn't have been saved. But this is what the resistance WOULD have done. It would have given lie to the argument that Austria wanted to be Anschlussed out of existence. It would have wakened up the West to what kind of Fuhrer they were dealing with, there and then. There might well have been no surrender at Munich, and there might have been a real delay in Hitler moving on Czechoslovakia. A war delayed would be a war where the Allies had more time to build up their strength. So in the end, the Austrian Anschluss could have turned out differently – if Schuschnigg had chosen to fight to the very last. Gordon Brook-Shepherd, **The Anschluss** (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1963), 166-70.

It was an invasion, but not the kind one could make a war over.

The Austrians yelled their lungs out, cheering for Hitler.

Factories ran out of cloth for brown shirts.

Nazi banners fluttered from the biggest cathedral in Vienna on orders of the Cardinal.

Girls pelted the Wehrmacht with flowers.¹⁸

Austrians were more Nazi than the Germans, and they went so far to ravage the country's 400,000 Jews that even the Gestapo was embarrassed.

Hitler was so smitten that instead of turning Austria into a puppet state,

¹⁸ Piers Brendon, **The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s** (New York: Knopf, 2000), 537-38.

he annexed it into Germany on the spot.¹⁹

... and, within a few days, had arrested 76,000 people in Vienna alone.

6000 officials were dismissed immediately

The Defence Minister was murdered.

Some twenty generals were sacked.²⁰

And in his plebiscite, 99.73% of the electorate voted for the Anschluss.

Perhaps the greatest sign of optimism – a sense that the future really would be a whole lot better now that the Reich was in charge – the birthrate went up 300%.

“If this was rape, never have I seen a more willing victim,” one London reporter wrote.²¹

If Austrians were so happy to be under the swastika, what business did France or Britain have to object?

And if they objected, what business did they have to fight to save the all too willing victim from its fate?

¹⁹ Gordon Brook-Shepherd, **The Anschluss** (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1963), 191-94.

²⁰ Gordon Brook-Shepherd, **The Anschluss** (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1963), 198-99.

²¹ Piers Brendon, **The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s** (New York: Knopf, 2000), 538-40.

It'd be the old Groucho Marx line:

“Remember, we’re fighting for this woman’s honor –
which is more than *she* ever did!”

From that point on, the pressure intensified against Czechoslovakia.

It was shaped like a bone – and now it was a bone with the Reich’s
jaws around it.

Along the German frontier, it was ringed with mountains, forts and steel.

But its border with Austria was unmilitarized, undefended – and now that,
too, was a German frontier.

There were places where Germany and Austria lay across no more than
100 miles of Czech territory.

It could have its neck, its throat cut, much more easily now.²²

One could be of two minds about Austria. But Czechoslovakia was
an entirely different case.

²² Laurence LaFore, **The End of Glory**, 200-01.

B. Czechoslovakia

Just twenty years a state in 1938, it was as harmonious as a
John Cage concerto.

Carved out of the old Austro-Hungarian empire, it was made from bits of
Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia, Slovakia and a little bit of Ukraine.
Its people spoke many languages, worshipped in many kinds of
church. You could find...

Germans.... three million of them
Slavs...
Czechs...
Slovaks ...

And yet, in other ways it was the great success story of central Europe.

Tyrants rose all around it.
But it kept democratic institutions.

There were no pogroms, purges, coup d'etats, or assassinations.

Goering called the Czechs "a vile race of dwarfs without any culture."

In fact, they had one of the most cosmopolitan cities in Europe.
Prague was like an eastern Vienna.

Mozart had done some of his work there.

Franz Kafka wrote there.

It had industries, a strong little army, and a close alliance with
France.²³

But when Austria fell, it had the Reich to the west of it, the north, the south.

²³ Piers Brendon, **The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s** (New York: Knopf, 2000), 540.

*Goering: Czechoslovakia is “the vermiform appendix of Europe.
We shall have to operate.”*²⁴

The operating instruments were the German-speakers in Czechoslovakia.

They lived in the mountainous western and northern border lands
of what once had been Bohemia and Moravia.

They had NEVER been part of ANY national German state.

Bohemia’s borders were 400 years old, if not more.

And, till the 1930s, you couldn’t hear a peep about joining the

²⁴ Piers Brendon, **The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s** (New York: Knopf, 2000), 540-41.

Fatherland ... or, as it were, the Foster-Fatherland.²⁵

All the Reich had to do was stir them up, and print atrocities committed against them.

(Easy to do. You just get a Prague phone book, pick out German names, and make them your leading victims in the story you make up).

It demanded what THEY demanded: let Germans be German.

Their part of Czechoslovakia – the Sudetenland – must be allowed to break away and join the Third Reich.

There were several catches to this.

1. It's not at all clear that most German-speaking people in Czechoslovakia wanted to be part of Germany.

Many of them certainly didn't.

They had married with Czechs – and their wives, husbands, children, would be second-class citizens in the Reich.

Thousands were refugees from the Nazis.

²⁵ Laurence LaFore, **The End of Glory** (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1970), 210.

Annexation meant death in the concentration camps for them.

2. France and England both were pledged to protect Czechoslovakia from attack.

And France NEEDED Czechoslovakia as its ally.

The Czech army was part of French over all strategy, if there was a war with Germany.

Take away Czechoslovakia, and the other countries in Eastern Europe that France had as allies, would be at Germany's mercy.

3. Hitler's generals weren't ready to go to war over the Czechs.

And they weren't sure they had the means to protect their borders with France, if they threw men southward into the Sudetenland.

So this was a situation that needed careful planning.

Hitler needed an excuse to invade.

But the army wouldn't be ready till October 1st.

And the Czech government was being very annoying.

It was going out of its way to offer concessions to the Sudeten German leaders.

What were their terms? What would they like?

For a while it looked like Hitler would need to find an incident –
a savage act of Czech brutality – to justify invading...

Like the German ambassador being assassinated.

And wasn't it just like those stupid Czechs!

The thought of killing another country's representative just
never occurred to them.

Hitler had to draw up plans to assassinate his own country's
ambassador himself...

though in the end he didn't do it.

The Reich could get by on all kinds of little incidents...

brutal acts against Germans committed in the streets –

in the parks –

in the shops –

but mostly in the press: German newspapers made
them up.

And, because it needed to hold off on invading TILL October 1st, it told
its front-man in the Sudetenland never to be very clear about
WHAT he wanted.

Keep changing the requirements.

The Czech government called the front-man's bluff. They called him in for talks and handed him a blank paper.

Write your demands on it, they said.

Whatever you ask for, we'll give you.²⁶

(He begged off).

Up till September, the demands had been:

more self-rule for Germans
a pro-German foreign policy for Czechoslovakia.

Only then did word get out to the public that Czechoslovakia might have to give up part of his territory and hand it over to Hitler.

And, much worse, that England – which was pledged to defend Czechoslovakia – wanted them to do it.

And that Hitler would invade, if he didn't get his way.

If there was a time for standing up to the Reich, the time had come.

²⁶ Laurence LaFore, **The End of Glory** (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1970), 212-13.

But stand up to Hitler with what?

The Dominions had minced no words: they wanted Britain to cut a deal.

All their high commissioners in London pushed the PM to conciliate Hitler.

In the six months since Austria fell, England was no closer to building a navy, an air force, an army.

Far from having warned that it would protect its ally in Central Europe, it had made noises on noises on noises that it would be willing to go further to give Hitler his way than HITLER HIMSELF had demanded that anybody go.

In all of this, Churchill's warnings went unheard.

He had no place in the Conservative Cabinet.

His followers were few, weak, and discredited in the House of Commons.

Cabinet ministers ignored his warnings.

Now the last-ditch attempts to save the peace – by handing over a piece – began.

Neville Chamberlain thought his feet were on the ground.

But the rest of him was in the air, flying to and from Germany, for man-to-man talks with the Fuhrer.

Hitler couldn't believe it.

Here he had just demanded part of Czechoslovakia.

And here was the Prime Minister of England, not protesting, not resisting.

No, Chamberlain was telling him he could have everything he wanted, right there, on a platter.

What did he want?

Hitler wanted – said he wanted – everyplace in Czechoslovakia that was more than 80% German.

Chamberlain agreed. But getting the Cabinet to go along ... and the French...

and the Czechs...

would take time.

The Czechs held as firm as they could.

Pressed by their supposed allies, they promised to fight to defend themselves.

It took 48 hours of threats and an ultimatum before Prague gave way.

It wasn't German bullying – it was British and French bullying that did the trick.

The Godesberg Demands

Even then, it didn't prove to be enough.

Having been given everything he wanted, now Hitler demanded more, when he met Chamberlain at Godesberg.

“It is no longer any use,” he told the Prime Minister.²⁷

— now, something must be done to slice off shares of Czechoslovakia for Hungary and Poland, too.

– the problem must be settled by October first, or he would move troops in.

– a border must be drawn instantly.

And instantly, all Czech military, police and civil agencies must be pulled out from over the line.

German troops would occupy that area.

– later on, all those areas would have a chance to vote on whether they wanted to join Germany.

But only Germans could vote – not Czechs.

This was too naked a grab for Chamberlain. He left baffled and angry.

And the world readied for war.

²⁷ Telford Taylor, **Munich: The Price of Peace** (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1979), 806-08.

They readied too soon. In fact, Chamberlain was looking, hard, for a way out.

The last thing he had any intention of doing was backing up the Czechs.

The most he would do, was let them make the decision without strong-arming them to give in further.

France wasn't just unprepared.

Its General Staff never even made plans for a march on Germany, to help out the Czechs.

Chamberlain: "How horrible, fantastic, incredible it is that we should be digging trenches and trying on gas masks here because of a quarrel in a far away country between people of whom we know nothing."²⁸

Don't be fooled by the reflective tone.

Chamberlain should have known that it wasn't between people of whom they knew nothing.

It was between the Czech government and Hitler – and about Hitler, he and everybody else knew more than enough.

And England was trying on gas masks because it had given its sacred word to protect these people of whom it knew nothing, against invaders and tyrants.

²⁸ Winston S. Churchill, **The Gathering Storm**, 282.

As for the notion that England shouldn't get involved where there were strange people that English people didn't understand....

What on earth was the whole Empire, but just that?

What did Tommy Atkins know about the Bantus?
 the Matabele?
 the Ashanti?
 the Sindh?
 the people in Tibet and Afghanistan?

Was Prague someplace more alien than, say, Palestine?

Four Power Conference, Sept. 29-30, 1938

It was just on the brink that Hitler offered a new deal:

– a summit conference of the four big powers, on Czechoslovakia

Chamberlain seized the chance.

There, with Mussolini as broker on the deal, an agreement was worked out.

Hitler wouldn't get to march into the Sudetenland right away.
 An international commission would draw the borders and decide what of Czechoslovakia to give away.

It didn't HAVE to give all the German-speaking parts.
 The boundaries didn't have to fit language and culture.

And all four powers would guarantee what was left of Czechoslovakia.

Best of all, Hitler would agree to open talks on all the other issues that stood between England and Germany.

There just might be a wholesale settlement of all the causes for war.

Now, there were just three nations – all of which had a real stake in the outcome – that were shut out of the talks....

1. the United States
2. the Soviet Union
3. Czechoslovakia

In all these talks, the Czech government was left out, on the other side of the door.

The text of the agreement was brought out, and when the Czech representative read it, he burst into tears.

He wasn't told to consult or discuss.

Czechoslovakia must accept it, and at once.²⁹

If it fought, it would fight all alone. England and France washed their hands of her.

²⁹ Laurence LaFore, **The End of Glory** (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1970), 225.

And the “compromise” when it went into operation wasn’t a compromise at all.

1. Hungary and Poland were allowed to take big shares of Czechoslovakia.
2. The commission, which met in Berlin, gave Hitler every acre he wanted ... and then some
3. That four-power guarantee turned into waste-paper almost at once.

Germany wasn’t about to promise anything.
Italy wasn’t about to promise anything.

Within two weeks, German soldiers would be in the Sudetenland.

When Hitler demanded MORE bits of Czechoslovakia – bits that he never claimed before – bits with just about NO Germans in them – the Czech government gave in without a peep.

It had given up the fortresses and the high grounds.

It had been left utterly defenseless.

And it knew that nobody in England or France would go to war over the little grabs, when they’d failed to do a thing about the big ones.

In fact, English people never knew that it happened at all. The newspapers cut it out of their reporters’ stories. Chamberlain saw to that.

Chamberlain came home, lionized and glorified.

He waved the protocols he had signed with Hitler.

They were, he told crowds, “peace with honor,”
“Peace for our time.”

The Church called a day of national thanksgiving.

Downing Street was buried under letters, flowers, umbrellas and fishing rods from the Prime Minister's admirers.³⁰

C. "Long Live the Shameful Peace"³¹

Munich was catastrophic, and there were those who knew it at the time.

French Premier Daladier knew that he had dealt France a terrible blow at Munich, and came back to face crowds screaming for his head.

Instead, his car was mobbed with cheering crowds, so glad not to have gone to war.

They festooned the car with flowers.

³⁰ Piers Brendon, **The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s** (New York: Knopf, 2000), 625.

³¹ Piers Brendon, **The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s** (New York: Knopf, 2000), 596. These are the sharp words of Jean Cocteau. Many other Frenchmen were outraged over Munich from the moment it happened, and saw plainly the wreckage it had made of France's military deterrent. Indeed, in one opinion poll of French men, 37% of them disapproved of Munich. Fifty seven percent approved, however. Georges Bernanos declared it "the Te Deum of cowards." And this is one reason why the new Finance Minister, Paul Reynaud, immediately raised arms spending from 29 billion francs to 93 billion francs.

They tried to kiss Daladier.

They dumped out waste paper baskets from the highest windows, as a bargain-basement ticker-tape parade.

Daladier snarled, “the fools!” (There are much earthier versions of what he said).³²

He was right. It was a humiliation and a surrender – and not just France’s.

Winston Churchill told Chamberlain: you have been given a choice between shame and war. You have chosen shame; but you will have war, too.³³

General Charles De Gaulle warned that France had sold its honor to keep peace. All it won was a “brief respite, like old Madame Du Barry with her head on the block begging: ‘Just a few more seconds, Mr. Executioner!’”³⁴

And, strange to say, the man of peace, Mahatma Gandhi, called Munich “peace without honor,” and predicted that it would bring no peace.³⁵

Chamberlain’s defenders then and later would argue:

³² Piers Brendon, **The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s** (New York: Knopf, 2000), 595.

³³ The phrasing varies. The form I take is: “You were given the choice between war and dishonor. You chose dishonor and you will have war.” But Churchill had been throwing out various forms of the epigram for some weeks, in letters and in conversation. Telford Taylor, **Munich: The Price of Peace** (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1979), 978.

³⁴ Piers Brendon, **The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s** (New York: Knopf, 2000), 596.

³⁵ John Gunther, **Inside Asia**, 361.

– Munich was right in itself.

People should have the right to decide what country they belong to.
Why should Czechs rule Germans, who wanted to be part of Germany?

What right had England to stand in the German-speakers' way?³⁶

– Munich was inescapable.

Public opinion in England wouldn't stand for another war.

France and England weren't ready to fight.

They didn't have the guns, the men, the money.

Hitler could have taken the Sudetenland any time he wanted, by war

– Munich bought time.

Hitler couldn't be trusted.

But if there was going to be a war, England and France needed time
and breathing space to build up their power.

They had to play catch-up.

Selling out the Czechs won them a year to do it in.

The arguments won't hold up at all.

– England wasn't working out a deal so that German-speaking Czechs could

³⁶ Among the leading defenders later was A. J. P. Taylor who declared that British policy to dismember Czechoslovakia began before there was the slightest fear of war, and that the Munich settlement 'was a triumph for British policy, ... not a triumph for Hitler, who had started with no such clear intention.... It was a triumph for all that was best and most enlightened in British life; a triumph for those who had preached equal justice between peoples; a triumph for those who had courageously denounced the harshness and short-sightedness of Versailles.' Telford Taylor, **Munich: The Price of Peace** (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1979), 979-80.

have self-determination.

Nobody held a plebiscite.

Nobody gave the German-speaking parts of Czechoslovakia a chance for a full, fair vote on whether they wanted to join Germany.

And maybe they didn't.

The people in Alsace and Lorraine spoke German.
But they would die, to keep themselves part of France.

Language and culture aren't everything. Freedom counts. If you speak German, but go to synagogue, would YOU want to join the Third Reich?³⁷

– France and England weren't so completely overmatched as all that.

The Czech fortifications were solid and strong.
German generals weren't absolutely sure they could break through.³⁸

The more troops the Reich sent into Czechoslovakia, the fewer there would be, on the borders with France.

France had about the same number of divisions as Germany – but it would be fighting on one front, not two.

³⁷ If England did the dismembering from some deep-felt conviction of the principle of national self-determination, why start in 1938, and with Czechoslovakia? You could find unhappy national minorities everywhere: there were Germans in the Italian Tyrol – why not press for annexation there? Or for the Hungarians in Yugoslavia and Romania? Or for the Poles in Germany? Or for the White Russians in Poland?

But of course the British government didn't care a rap about any of those groups. Why, then, worry about the Sudetenland Germans? The only reason was that, unlike the others, they had a Wehrmacht behind them – and they had a sponsor who could cause a war. "Moral right" had nothing to do with it. the threat of war had all. Telford Taylor, **Munich: The Price of Peace** (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1979), 980-81..

³⁸ Winston S. Churchill, **The Gathering Storm**, 301.

Germany's fortifications, the Siegfried Line, weren't finished yet, and couldn't be held without a lot of manpower.

What could France do, with 50 German divisions ranged on its border, the generals pleaded.

Not much. But there weren't fifty German divisions there.

There were five.

Heck, the French customs service could have handled THEM.

German generals told Hitler that they could hold the Siegfried Line for a few days... tops.

– as for buying time, England and France would be weaker compared to Hitler one year hence than now.

They had lost 35 divisions of Czech troops.

They had lost the Skoda works, the third biggest arms-making concern in Europe.

In that one loss, Germany added as much to its arms manufacturing as all of the factories in Britain put together.

England and France made more planes, and that counted for a lot.

Re-making the old biplanes, and building Hurricanes and

Spitfires ... in September 1938 that had only just started happening.

England had just five squadrons of the modern type.

Two years later, it had 47 squadrons.

It's very true that England did use the extra year to catch up with Germany in fighter planes...

but not bombers. It wouldn't catch up there till 1941.

And when it came to bombers, it was Germany that used that extra year of peace the best.

It didn't add all that many more planes.

But it replaced older planes with new ones.

And it had one more year to train pilots.

Fighter planes were crucial to the Battle of Britain.

Without the RAF, Hitler would have had air supremacy, enough to mount an invasion.

But it wasn't the planes that let Hitler carry on the Blitz.

It was the bases.

It was only when his armies had control of the Low Countries and northern France that Britain was within striking range.

And in 1938, Hitler didn't have the power to do either one.³⁹

³⁹ Winston S. Churchill, **The Gathering Storm**, 302; Telford Taylor, **Munich: The Price of Peace** (Garden

What about the Blitzkrieg? That depended on panzers – tanks.

In 1940, Hitler had no end of those.

– 10 panzer divisions, in all

In 1938, he had very few.

– three panzer divisions

There would have been no German breakthrough.

By the end of 1939, Germany WOULD have a navy with some power to its punch.

It WOULD have the Siegfried Line completed.

And here's the other consideration.

If the war had started in 1938, Hitler would have gone in alone.

Italy had no Pact of Steel with the Reich.

It wasn't ready for war, and would have sat it out.

Japan was a long way from ready for war.
It, too, would have stayed out.

As for Russia, instead of being Hitler's ally, it would have
been ready to fight him, or at the very worst, stayed
neutral.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Telford Taylor, **Munich: The Price of Peace** (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1979), 985. We have to offer some cautions about what the Soviet Union would have done in 1938. From the latest delving into the Russian archives, it is very clear that the Soviet Union's leadership was quite uncertain how far to go, and that between the United Fronters (like Litvinov) and the Go-it-Aloners (like Zhdanov), there was a strong debate. Still, what does seem clear was that the USSR was not prepared to give Czechoslovakia any help on its own – only as part of a combined action with the French, or under the aegis of the League of Nations. Even at the height of the crisis – at Godesberg – the Soviet Union, when put to the question by the Czechs, made clear that they were not willing to promise anything. On the contrary, Stalin's real buildup was along the border of Poland, where a border dispute was under way. It seemed quite possible that – if war did break out between France and Germany (and this the Soviet Union didn't

Selling out Czechoslovakia, the British and French had all but bartered away any chance of ringing Hitler round with enemies.

They had offended the Soviet Union by cutting it out of the four-power talks. And that was worse than unmannerly. It was mad.

For three years, the Soviets had been warning of the threat from the Reich.

They had called – till they were hoarse – for a combined effort to hem Hitler in, before it was too late.

With France on his west and Russia on his right in alliance, with Britain commanding the seas, there would be no war that Hitler could possibly win.

In other words, there would be no war.

think would happen, but couldn't be sure) – Stalin would have used the opportunity to take a slice out of Poland. Or it is possible that it was meant as a message to Poland that IT had better not take its own slice of Czechoslovakia and join Germany in on the kill. We just don't know. See Zara Steiner, "The Soviet Commissariat of Foreign Affairs and the Czechoslovakian Crisis in 1938: New Material from the Soviet Archives," Historical Journal, 42 (September 1999): 751-779.

But if there was – and this the Soviets didn't say, but meant – just about all the fighting would be done between Germany and its enemies to the west.⁴¹

The moment Czechoslovakia fell, though, it was pretty clear where Hitler would move next: east into Poland.

And then his panzers would be sitting on the Russian border.

The whole picture changed.

Instead of talking up an alliance with the West, Stalin's best chance of averting a war – and one where the West would treat him pretty much the way he planned on treating them – was to cut a deal with the Third Reich, so that they'd take their pickings from someplace else.

D. You Chose Shame; You Will Get War, Too

We shouldn't belittle the cheering over "peace for our time."

The cheers were real.

⁴¹ Laurence LaFore, **The End of Glory** (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1970), 226-27.

The relief was real.

Nobody *wanted* another Verdun, another Somme, another Passchendaele.

Yet, the last echoes of the cheering crowds had barely died away before, through England, you could sense a shift in mood.

Peace had been won, but as passions spent, people noticed the price-tag: the wholesale looting of Czechoslovakian territory.

What had they been cheering?

They'd been cheering a peace that Chamberlain told them was a much better deal for Czechoslovakia than what Hitler had been insisting on.

But as the details started coming out, it became starkly clear that the deal wasn't a bit better.

In some ways, it was worse.

If Chamberlain had so muzzled the press and made the editors stick to printing all the good news and leaving out the bad., the reaction would have been still worse.

As it was, within two weeks the Germans had all the German-speaking bits of Czechoslovakia.

They also had some of the parts where most people were Czechs.

Statesmanship looked more like cowardice.

When the Nazis unleashed their violence on Jewish neighborhoods in *Kristallsnacht*, who was surprised?

It was just more of the same – only a little more brutal.

But it drove home the point: when Neville Chamberlain brought “peace with honor,” he did it by widening the area of Nazi sadism to include the Czechs.

Brendan Bracken: “One Funk in the German cabinet, and 22 in the British.”

Claud Cockburn: Chamberlain has “turned all four cheeks” to Hitler.

On Guy Fawkes night, some people burned effigies in frock coats, black Homburgs – and carrying neatly-rolled brollies.

China ornaments honoring Chamberlain the peace-bringer went unsold.⁴²

And in France they were calling him “*J’aime Berlin.*”

⁴²Piers Brendon, *The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s* (New York: Knopf, 2000), 625-26.

There was another aspect of what Chamberlain had promised:

a general settlement of all the difficulties of Europe.

For so great a reward, was the Sudetenland so exorbitant a price?

But the “general settlement” vanished like mist on a field in early morning.

If Czechoslovakia could be “adjusted” by the Poles and Hungarians grabbing pieces, what border from the Versailles settlement was more than a line on a piece of paper?

What country didn’t have its Sudetenland?⁴³

There were Poles in Germany and Germans in
Poland....
Slovaks in Yugoslavia ...
Hungarians in Romania..

Czechoslovakia’s degradation set the precedent for new demands –

and where would it all end?

If the Great Powers wouldn’t use their authority to maintain the lines that had held for twenty years, who would?

France very soon got a taste of where things might go.

By late fall, Mussolini was whipping up Italy’s bully-boys for new conquests...

And his crowds shouted, “Tunis! Corsica! Nice!”

⁴³ Laurence LaFore, **The End of Glory** (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1970), 231-32.

- but Corsica had been French for 170 years and nobody would have dreamed that it was open for takers

- and Nice? Nice was PART of mainland France, and had been since 1860. It had been part of France for longer than there'd been an Italy. The people spoke French; they *were* French.⁴⁴

So instead of a general settlement, Munich really fostered a general unsettlement, and invited a full-scale game of smash & grab.

Munich was such a bad deal that even the Foreign Office started to notice.

Halifax had reached the saturation point a few days before the final sellout in Munich.

He saw now what he'd missed before – that Hitler would keep none of his promises

If he had had his way, there would have been no “peace for our time.”⁴⁵

And when Chamberlain visited Mussolini's Italy, there were lots of cheers for him in Rome... not in London.

⁴⁴ Laurence LaFore, **The End of Glory** (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1970), 234-36; Piers Brendon, **The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s** (New York: Knopf, 2000), 572. Mussolini did his bit by writing an article (published anonymously) entitled, “France is a Spittoon.” The French responded to the demand for Nice by picketing the Italian embassy in Paris, calling for “Venice for honeymoon couples.”

⁴⁵ Andrew Roberts, **“The Holy Fox”: A Biography of Lord Halifax** (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991), 114-21.

What England saw was a Prime Minister who refused to meet with the Pope – because Mussolini might be offended.

He came back boasting of real progress on settling England's disputes with Italy.

– a treaty? No.

– an agreement? No.

– even some sign that the agreement that Mussolini had made with England a year before would actually be carried out? No.

– but Mussolini had appeared in evening dress!

Don't tell me THAT isn't proof of a change of heart!!⁴⁶

But privately, even Chamberlain was seeing things more clearly than before.

It was plain that no matter what England did, the Axis would be a Hit and Muss affair.

There was no pushing the dictators apart.

It was also plain that Hitler was looking for somewhere else to push his weight around.

⁴⁶ Piers Brendon, **The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s** (New York: Knopf, 2000), 627; Donald Cameron Watt, **How War Came**, 94-98.

Conquest? Maybe not.

But if not, then definitely strong-arm tactics to make other countries in central Europe sneeze when Germany took snuff.

You didn't need to fly the swastika over Romania, say, to make their foreign policy do the goose-step.

The faster Britain re-armed, the better.

The sooner it got France and Belgium into intense high-level talks about mutual defense, the better.

He felt so strongly about it ... that *he almost might have done something beyond feeling strongly.*⁴⁷

III. THE ROAD BACK

A. Cancelled Czechs, 1939

Even so, The real turning point came only in March 1939.

On March 9th, the Prime Minister told the press that the European situation looked very hopeful.

... meaning, really, that it looked better than it had, when it looked just plain awful.

⁴⁷ But he didn't. It was only on April 20th that a Ministry of Supply was authorized; only then that conscription was begun, only on April 26th that legislation was introduced for compulsory military service for all men between 20 and 21. See Telford Taylor, **Munich: The Price of Peace** (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1979), 973.

His Home Secretary announced that IF all the European tangles could only be squared away, modern science and finance could kick off a “new golden age.”⁴⁸

If.

But that if had a shelf-life of just five days.

That was when Germany abandoned its pledges and took over the rest of Czechoslovakia.

Until now, Hitler had seemed obsessed only with bringing Germans back into their homeland.

What did his empire need with Slavs? Or Czechs?

Now that argument was proved a lie.

First step: you get the Slovaks to make a revolution and declare their part of Czechoslovakia an independent country.

... a Nazi satellite.

⁴⁸ Donald Cameron Watt, How War Came, 162-64.

Second step: you force the Czech president, Emil Hacha,⁴⁹ to come to Berlin.

And there you scream at the old man and terrify him.

Tell him that you can turn Prague into rubble in two hours, with your bombers, if he doesn't give in.

Hacha wasn't just terrified. He fainted.

(It may have been a small heart attack).⁵⁰

The Fuhrer's doctor had to revive him with injections.

⁴⁹ Hacha was a chair-warmer. Seeing that there wasn't a hope of help from its allies, Czechoslovakia had swung hard to propitiate its biggest enemy. Edouard Benes was forced to resign, and Hacha became president in October. He wasn't a Nazi. He definitely wasn't bucking for the job, either. He was a poor, sick old man, who took the job because it was the only real hope of keeping the Germans from marching in. Nobody running Czechoslovakia believed that Hitler would leave them alone; it was a matter of time. And now, he came to Berlin in a last, desperate gamble, to plead for his country, to crawl, to beg, if need be – all of which was in vain. See Donald Cameron Watt, How War Came, 153.

⁵⁰ Donald Cameron Watt, How War Came, 153-54.

The yelling went on.

In the end, Hacha surrendered, ordering his troops not to fire on the Wehrmacht as they marched in.

Bohemia and Moravia became German protectorates.

Slovakia fell soon after that.

What did England do? It had promised to protect Czechoslovakia.

Ah, His Majesty's Government explained, so it had.

But when Slovakia seceded, there wasn't really a Czechoslovakia TO protect any more.

So all England's promises were null and void.⁵¹

The biggest casualty of the Czechoslovakian invasion wasn't appeasement.

It was the protective cloak that appeasers had put over their heads to blind themselves.

Until then, every move Hitler had made was to unite Germans.

“One Race, One State, One Leader.”

That was the talk – and very convincing talk, too.

But, of course, the further from Germany's original borders, the fewer Germans there were.

⁵¹ Laurence LaFore, The End of Glory (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1970), 240.

It set a very comforting limit on how far Hitler'd go.

What would he want with Czechs, Slovaks, Poles,
Slavs, Magyars?

Now, by swallowing up Czechs, the Reich proved that its talk of
“One Race, One State” was claptrap.

ANYONE made fair game.

Hitler was willing to conquer anyone, anywhere, any time.

No one was safe.⁵²

B. Aggression from A to Zog

Mussolini tried to get into the act on Good Friday, 1939.

He simply had to keep up with Hitler.

Anything else would make it look as if the Reich was the senior
partner in the Axis.

What was Benito – just some kind of tag-along?

⁵² Laurence LaFore, **The End of Glory** (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1970), 241.

What he needed, and right away, was somebody – anybody – he could beat up.

The problem is, who can you find that's an even bigger pushover than Italy itself?

If you can't beat on your enemies, then pick on your friends.⁵³

So Il Duce invaded Albania, the nuttiest an act of international smash & grab this side of *The Mouse that Roared*

1. who would want it? Albania was so poor that, as one visitor said, the people would kill you for the lice in your shirt.

2. Italy all but owned it already. It had a protectorate. The King on the throne, King Zog, was a good Fascist, a tribal chieftain who'd killed his way to the top.

As Mussolini's enemies put it, annexing Albania, for Italy, was like raping your own wife.⁵⁴

Black shirts went in, and red faces came out.

The invasion was a colossal screw-up.

Radio communication was so terrible that the only way Italian leaders back home could tell what was going on

⁵³ Donald Cameron Watt, *How War Came*, 199-206.

⁵⁴ Piers Brendon, *The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s* (New York: Knopf, 2000), 573.

was to have a senior official fly in and fly out of the little country.

King Zog didn't put up a struggle. He packed some buckets with rubies and emeralds and most of the country's gold reserves and ran away.

(never to come back)⁵⁵

The Italian chief of staff later said:

“If only the Albanians had possessed a well-armed fire brigade, they could have driven us back into the Adriatic.”⁵⁶

Albania just showed how far from a full deck the P. M. was playing with.

Two days before the troops went marching, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff officially declared any talk of an Italian invasion into Albania was “bilge.”

It would take weeks of build-up, and English intelligence would be sure to spot it.

Besides, hadn't Mussolini given his word that he had no intention of meddling with Albania's integrity?⁵⁷

C. Die for Danzig?

⁵⁵ Donald Cameron Watt, **How War Came**, 208. Zog died in Egypt, still an exile.

⁵⁶ Piers Brendon, **The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s** (New York: Knopf, 2000), 573.

⁵⁷ Donald Cameron Watt, **How War Came**, 208-09.

The swallowing of Czechoslovakia didn't just show that Hitler's word was valueless.

It pointed like an arrow to his next victim, now encircled nicely: Poland.

Start by admitting that Germany had a case in Poland.

The Versailles settlement had taken areas of Imperial Germany, German-speaking areas, and forced them into the new nation of Poland.

Right where the Baltic Sea was, was the Free City of Danzig. It governed itself.

In any vote, its 400,000 people would have joined Germany.

But it wasn't free NOT to be a Free City.

The Poles needed it as their outlet to the sea, at the head of a neck of land known as the Polish Corridor.

By now, though, it was clear that any surrender on the Polish Corridor would make Poland a landlocked country, wrecking its trade.

It would also be an appetizer.

The main course was other bits of Poland, where Germans lived.

And England and France suspected – rightly – that Hitler didn't want the Polish Corridor at all.

He wanted all Poland, and he meant to take it.

Which he did. By the time he moved into Czechoslovakia, he had even set the timetable to invading Poland: September 1st, 1939.

Chamberlain kept dreaming.

“Hitler has concluded that we mean business,” he wrote that summer,
“and that the time is not ripe for a major war.”