The Outbreak of World War 2
Collapse of the German Body Politic 1918

• As the German war effort collapsed in late 1918 and the army sought an armistice, the German body politic also collapsed.

• On 29 October, rebellion broke out in Kiel among sailors. Sailors, soldiers, and workers began electing Workers' and Soldiers' Councils modelled after the Soviets of the Russian Revolution of 1917.

• The revolution spread throughout Germany, and participants seized military and civil powers in individual cities.

• By 7 November, the revolution had reached Munich, resulting in King Ludwig III of Bavaria fleeing. The Social Democratic Party (SPD) decided to make use of their support at the grassroots and put themselves at the front of the movement, demanding that Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicate.

• When Wilhelm refused the Chancellor, Prince Max of Baden, simply announced the abdication on 9 November 1918.

• Prince Max himself was forced to resign later the same day, when it became clear that only Friedrich Ebert, leader of the SPD, could effectively exert control.

• On 10 November, Wilhelm crossed the border by train and went into exile in the Netherlands.
Collapse of the Austro Hungarian Empire

• Austria-Hungary was one of the Central Powers in World War I which started when it declared war on the Kingdom of Serbia on July 28, 1914.

• It was already effectively dissolved by the time the military authorities signed the armistice on 3 November 1918. The Kingdom of Hungary and the First Austrian Republic were treated as its successors de jure.

• On 11 November 1918, the same day as the armistice ending the war between the Allied Powers and Germany, Emperor Charles issued a carefully worded proclamation in which he recognized the Austrian people’s right to determine the form of the state and "relinquish(ed) every participation in the administration of the State." He issued a similar proclamation two days later for Hungary.

• The independence of the West Slavs and South Slavs of the Empire as the First Czechoslovak Republic, the Second Polish Republic and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, respectively, and most of the territorial demands of the Kingdom of Romania were also recognized by the victorious powers in 1920.
The Weimar Republic

• National Assembly elections took place in Germany on 19 January 1919.

• In this time, the radical left-wing parties, including the USPD and KPD, were barely able to get themselves organised,

• resulting in a solid majority of seats for the SPD moderate forces.

• To avoid the ongoing fights in Berlin, the National Assembly convened in the city of Weimar, giving the future Republic its unofficial name.
Ongoing Turmoil

• During the debates in Weimar, fighting continued. A Soviet republic was declared in Munich, but was quickly put down by *Freikorps* and remnants of the regular army.

• The fall of the Munich Soviet Republic to these units, many of which were situated on the extreme right, resulted in the growth of far-right movements and organisations in Bavaria.

• Sporadic fighting continued to flare up around the country. In eastern provinces:
  • forces loyal to Germany's fallen Monarchy fought the republic, while
  • militias of Polish nationalists fought for independence

Armed *Freikorps* paramilitaries in Berlin in 1919.
Treaty of Versailles

- The Treaty of Versailles was signed after the peace conference on 28 June 1919.
- It established the League of Nations.
- Germany lost large areas to neighbouring countries, Alsace Lorraine to France, areas to Belgium and Denmark and large areas including the Danzig corridor to Poland.
- It also lost all its colonies to League of Nations mandates with the administration of the mandates spread among various of the victorious allies. Britain (Tanganika), France (Togo) South Africa (Namibia) Japan (Pacific Islands) New Zealand (Samoa) and Australia (New Guinea and Nauru).
- The German Army was limited to 100,000 men and was forbidden to have tanks.
- The navy was limited to 6 pre-dreadnought capital ships (obsolete even before 1914), and forbidden from having submarines and no air force was permitted.
- The Rhineland while remaining part of Germany was demilitarised.
- Germany was required to make an admission of guilt and to pay enormous financial reparations.
Rearrangement of Europe after the World War
League of Nations Plebiscites after the World War
Rearrangement of Germany

- The treaty stripped Germany of 25,000 square miles (65,000 km²) of territory and 7 million people.
- To compensate for the destruction of French coal mines, Germany was to cede the output of the Saar coalmines to France and control of the Saar to the League of Nations for 15 years; a plebiscite would then be held to decide sovereignty.
- The treaty "restored" the provinces of Alsace-Lorraine to France by rescinding the treaties of 1871 which had transferred these provinces to Germany.
- Schleswig-Holstein was partitioned after a plebiscite and the northern part was transferred to Denmark.
- Large areas were on historical and ethnic grounds transferred to Poland so that the new state could have access to the sea. This became known as the Polish Corridor.
- Germany was to cede the city of Danzig and its hinterland, including the delta of the Vistula River on the Baltic Sea, for the League of Nations to establish the Free City of Danzig.
Rearrangement of Poland

1848

Germany (Prussia)

Russia

Austria

1919

Germany

Russia

Austria
The Weimar Constitution

• After approval by the National Assembly, Ebert, the first President, signed the constitution into law on 11 August 1919.

• The Weimar Constitution created a republic under a parliamentary republic system with the *Reichstag* elected by proportional representation.

• The President of the Reich, directly elected by the people for a seven year term, was vested with extensive powers by the Weimar Constitution so that he would be a counterweight to the Reichstag.
  • Among his powers as head of state were the right to dissolve the Reichstag and
  • the authority, in the event of public safety being endangered, to declare a state of emergency and enact emergency decrees, which had the status of laws.

• There was provision for the Reichstag to amend or override the constitution by a two thirds majority vote.

• The Weimar Republic allowed Wilhelm to remove twenty-three railway wagons of furniture, twenty-seven containing packages of all sorts, one bearing a car and another a boat, from the New Palace at Potsdam.
League of Nations

• Formed in 1920 to prevent wars through collective security and disarmament and to settle international disputes through negotiation and arbitration, the league was weakened from the beginning when the American Congress refused to permit America to join the League.

• President Wilson himself had presided over the committee that drafted the Covenant of the League of Nations but was unable to get US membership of the League approved by the Senate.
League of Nations Mandates

The Treaty of Versailles handed over former German colonies to the victorious powers to administer on behalf of the League of Nations. The Pacific Mandates were:

1. South Pacific Mandate – Japan
2. Territory of New Guinea – Australia
3. Nauru – Australia, Britain and New Zealand
4. Western Samoa – New Zealand

The Japanese had moved an amendment to the Covenant of the League of Nations claiming equality of treatment for all members of the signatory states. The Australian Prime Minister, Mr Hughes, had a hard struggle in successfully opposing the Japanese amendment.

During the debate on the Peace Treaty in the House of Representatives on 17th September 1919, it was said that "Australia has taken its frontiers northward to Rabaul, but the frontier of Japan has been brought southward 3,000 miles to the equator, until their front door and our back door almost adjoin". 
League of Nations Mandates

African Mandates
Britain (Tanganika and part Cameroon), France (Togo and part Cameroon) South Africa (Namibia)
1919 to 1923 – Hyperinflation

• The German economy was overwhelmed by the enormous cost of the war, lack of control following the revolutionary changes in regime, socialist policies and the liability for reparations.
• Hyperinflation broke out. In 1919, one loaf of bread cost 1 mark; by 1923, the same loaf of bread cost 100 billion marks.
• In 1923 the Republic claimed it could no longer afford reparations and defaulted on some payments.
• In response, French and Belgian troops occupied the Ruhr region, taking control of most mining and manufacturing companies in January 1923.
• Strikes were called, and passive resistance was encouraged. These strikes lasted eight months, further damaging the economy and social life.
• In Nov 1923 currency stability was reestablished by “Redenomination”. 1 trillion old marks was converted to 1 new Mark.
• The redenomination successfully arrested the inflation and lead to a period of successful economic growth.
• But, all savings held in cash or bank deposits or government bonds had become worthless.

• A 50 million mark banknote issued in 1923, worth approximately one U.S. dollar when issued,
• would have been worth approximately 12 million U.S. dollars nine years earlier, but
• within a few weeks inflation made the banknote practically worthless.
Election of Hindenburg April 1925

• President Ebert died on 28 February 1925 following an appendectomy.

• A new election had to be held within a month. None of the candidates attained the required majority. By law there had to be another election.

• The parties on the right established a committee to select their strongest candidate. After a week's indecision they decided on Field Marshal Hindenburg, despite his advanced age, of 78, and a fear, notably by Foreign Minister Stresemann, of unfavorable reactions by their former enemies.

• His campaign stressed his devotion to "social justice, religious equality, genuine peace at home and abroad."

• He addressed only one public meeting, held in Hanover, and gave one radio address on 11 April calling for a Volksgemeinschaft (national community) under his leadership.

• The second election, held on 26 April 1925, required only a plurality, which he obtained thanks to the support of the Bavarian People's Party (BVP), which had switched from Marx, and by the refusal of the Communists to withdraw their candidate Ernst Thälmann.

• In Britain and France the victory of the aged field marshal was accepted with equanimity.
Depression and Disarmament

• In May 1929 in England Ramsay MacDonald became Prime Minister for the second time. He had been a pacifist in 1914-18 and was a leader in the international disarmament movement.

• In October 1929 share prices in New York began to collapse and soon the entire world was suffering an acute trade depression.

• The United States, Japan, France, Italy, and the British nations—met in January 1930. In the resulting London Naval Treaty,
  • the Washington Treaty limitations were extended, and cruisers, destroyers and submarines were brought within treaty restrictions.
  • The parties agreed to defer until 1936 the replacement of capital ships.
  • The British Commonwealth, the United States and Japan, undertook to reduce at once their capital ships in numbers to 15-15-9 respectively.
  • The treaty was to remain in force until 31st December 1936. The aim had been economy and security.

• Further significant reductions were made in defence spending in Britain and Australia in 1930, driven by revenue collapse and encouraged by the London Treaty.
The Great Depression

• The Great Depression began in 1929 and wrought worldwide economic, social, and psychological consequences.

• The German unemployment rate approached 30% in 1932

• By 1930 the German economy was beset with mass unemployment and widespread business failures.

• The Social Democrats and Communists were bitterly divided and unable to formulate an effective solution.

The German army feeds the poor, Berlin, 1931
1930

- Reich president Paul von Hindenburg's advisers persuaded him to invoke the constitution's emergency presidential powers. These powers allowed the president to restore law and order in a crisis.

- On 29 March 1930, the finance expert Heinrich Brüning was appointed Chancellor by President von Hindenburg to rule by emergency decrees instead of by laws passed by the Reichstag.

- He enacted a draconian policy of deflation and drastically cutting state expenditure. Benefits for the unemployed, sick, invalid and pensioners were reduced sharply.
September 1930

- Brüning was the first chancellor under the new presidential system. He was unable to negotiate a majority in the Reichstag, and in September 1930, there were new elections.

- The NSDAP (Nazi Party) had been in existence since 1919 and had been lead by Hitler since 1921. Unemployment had boosted membership of the party and the SA, the party’s paramilitary organisation.

- Hitler had been jailed for High Treason following the Beer Hall Putsch in 1923 but had been pardoned by the Bavarian Supreme court and freed in December 1924.

- Hitler proved to be a highly effective campaigner, pioneering the use of radio and aircraft for this purpose.

- Hitler’s message, blaming the economic crisis on the Jewish financiers and the Bolsheviks, resonated with wide sections of the electorate.

- The Nazi Party won an important victory, capturing 18.3% of the vote, five times more than in 1928, to make it the second largest party in the Reichstag after the SPD.

Outbreak of World War 2 - ©Jerry McBrien - 26 March 2019
1931 & 1932

• Brüning and Hitler were unable to reach terms of co-operation,

• The Nazi strategy was ... walk out when votes needed to be taken .. to paralyse the Reichstag (Parliament) in any sort of way they could during the depression.

• In Germany unemployment doubled from three million to six million, or one in three, by 1932.

• Brüning himself increasingly governed with the support of the President and Army over that of the parliament, cutting back expenditure while unemployment continued to rise.
1931 – The Manchurian Incident

• Japanese influence in Manchuria had grown following construction of the South Manchurian Railway.

• In 1931 the Japanese Kwantung army, stationed there to protect the railway, detonated an explosion near the railway line (the Mukden Incident), blamed the Chinese and invaded and occupied the whole of Manchuria after five months of fighting.

• The incident had been staged despite specific orders from the Japanese government, nevertheless Japan went on to institutionalise its control over Manchuria by installing the last emperor of China, Puyi, as head of the puppet state of Manchukuo.

• Militarily too weak to challenge Japan directly, China appealed to the League of Nations for help.

• The League established the Lytton Commission to evaluate the Incident.
The SA 1931 & 32

• From January 1931 the SA was headed by Ernst Röhm, who harboured radical anticapitalist notions.

• SA membership, swelled from the ranks of the Great Depression’s unemployed, grew to 400,000 by 1932.

• By the end of 1931 the SA suffered 47 deaths, and the Rotfront recorded losses of approximately 80.

• Street fights and beer hall battles resulting in deaths occurred throughout February and April 1932.
1932 Presidential Election

• Hindenburg's term as president was ending in the spring of 1932. At age 84, he was reluctant to run again, but knew that if he didn't, Hitler, the 'Bohemian Corporal', would win.

• Hitler contested the presidential election which pitted him against the monumentally popular Hindenburg.

• In the first round on 13 March, Hitler polled over 11 million votes but was still behind Hindenburg.

• The second and final round took place on 10 April: Hindenburg got 53.0%, Hitler 36.8% and Thälmann, the Communist 10.2%.

• At this time, the Nazi Party had just over 800,000 card-carrying members.

• Bruning was already in trouble with Hindenburg, who blamed him for the political turmoil that had made it necessary to run for re-election at age 85 against the 'Bohemian Corporal' Adolf Hitler.
July 1932 Election

• The general elections on 31 July 1932 yielded major gains for the Communists, and for the Nazis, who won 37.3% of the vote.

• The Nazi party then supplanted the Social Democrats as the largest party in the Reichstag, although it did not gain a majority.

• Hitler refused a ministry under Papen, and demanded the chancellorship for himself, but was rejected by Hindenburg on 13 August 1932.

• There was still no majority in the Reichstag for any government; as a result, the Reichstag was dissolved and elections took place once more in the hope that a stable majority would result.

The SA had nearly two million members at the end of 1932.
November 1932 Election

• At the elections on 6 November 1932 the Nazis won 33.1% of the vote. Two million voters fewer than in the previous election.

• Franz von Papen stepped down and was succeeded as Chancellor by General Kurt von Schleicher on 3 December.

• After failing to form a workable majority in the Reichstag Schleicher asked for new elections.
January 1933

- Hindenburg, despite his misgivings about the Nazis' goals and about Hitler as a personality, reluctantly agreed to Papen's theory that, with Nazi popular support on the wane, Hitler could now be controlled as Chancellor.

- Hindenburg reluctantly agreed to appoint Hitler as chancellor after the two further parliamentary elections—in July and November 1932—had not resulted in the formation of a majority government.

- Hitler headed a coalition government formed by the NSDAP and Hugenberg's party, the German National People's Party (DNVP).

- On 30 January 1933, the new cabinet was sworn in during a brief ceremony in Hindenburg's office. The NSDAP gained three posts: Hitler was named chancellor, Wilhelm Frick Minister of the Interior, and Hermann Göring Minister of the Interior for Prussia.

- Hitler had insisted on the ministerial positions as a way to gain control over the police in much of Germany.
January - March 1933

• At the first meeting of his cabinet in 1933, Hitler prioritised military spending over unemployment relief.

• In a meeting with German military leaders on 3 February 1933, Hitler spoke of "conquest for Lebensraum in the East and its ruthless Germanisation" as his ultimate foreign policy objectives.

• In March, Prince Bernhard Wilhelm von Bülow, secretary at the Auswärtiges Amt (Foreign Office), issued a statement of major foreign policy aims:
  • Anschluss with Austria,
  • the restoration of Germany's national borders of 1914,
  • rejection of military restrictions under the Treaty of Versailles,
  • the return of the former German colonies in Africa, and
  • a German zone of influence in Eastern Europe.

• In public speeches during this period, Hitler stressed the peaceful goals of his policies and a willingness to work within international agreements.
March 1933 Election

• As chancellor, Hitler worked against attempts by the NSDAP's opponents to build a majority government. Because of the political stalemate, he asked Hindenburg to again dissolve the Reichstag, and elections were scheduled for early March.

• On 27 February 1933, the Reichstag building was set on fire. Göring blamed a communist plot, because Dutch communist Marinus van der Lubbe was found in incriminating circumstances inside the burning building.

• At Hitler's urging, Hindenburg responded with the Reichstag Fire Decree of 28 February, which suspended basic rights and allowed detention without trial. The decree was permitted under Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution, which gave the president the power to take emergency measures to protect public safety and order.

• Activities of the German Communist Party (KPD) were suppressed, and some 4,000 KPD members were arrested.

• In addition to political campaigning, the NSDAP engaged in paramilitary violence and the spread of anti-communist propaganda in the days preceding the election. On election day, 6 March 1933, the NSDAP's share of the vote increased to 43.9 per cent, and the party acquired the largest number of seats in parliament. Hitler's party failed to secure an absolute majority, necessitating another coalition with the DNVP.
21 March 1933

- On 21 March 1933, the new Reichstag was constituted with an opening ceremony at the Garrison Church in Potsdam. This "Day of Potsdam" was held to demonstrate unity between the Nazi movement and the old Prussian elite and military. Hitler appeared in a morning coat and humbly greeted Hindenburg.
March 1933 – The Enabling Act

• To achieve full political control despite not having an absolute majority in parliament, Hitler's government brought an Enabling Act to a vote in the newly elected Reichstag.

• The Act—officially titled the "Law to Remedy the Distress of People and Reich"—gave Hitler's cabinet the power to enact laws without the consent of the Reichstag for four years. These laws could deviate from the constitution. Since it would affect the constitution, the Enabling Act required a two-thirds majority to pass.

• Leaving nothing to chance, the Nazis used the provisions of the Reichstag Fire Decree to arrest all 81 Communist deputies (in spite of their virulent campaign against the party, the Nazis had allowed the KPD to contest the election) and prevent several Social Democrats from attending.

• On 23 March 1933, the Reichstag assembled at the Kroll Opera House under turbulent circumstances. Ranks of SA men served as guards inside the building, while large groups outside opposing the proposed legislation shouted slogans and threats towards the arriving members of parliament.

• The position of the Centre Party, the third largest party in the Reichstag, was decisive. After Hitler verbally promised party leader Ludwig Kaas that Hindenburg would retain his power of veto, Kaas announced the Centre Party would support the Enabling Act.

• The Act passed by a vote of 441–84, with all parties except the Social Democrats voting in favour. The Enabling Act, along with the Reichstag Fire Decree, transformed Hitler's government into a de facto legal dictatorship.
League of Nations

• The League had accepted Germany, as a member and also as a permanent member of the Council, in 1926, deeming it a "peace-loving country".

• The League's investigation into the Manchurian Incident led to the publication of the Lytton Report on October 2, 1932. It stated that Japan was the aggressor, had wrongfully invaded Manchuria and that it should be returned to the Chinese. It also argued that the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo should not be recognized, and recommended Manchurian autonomy under Chinese sovereignty.

• The League of Nations General Assembly adopted the report but no action was taken.

• This failure to act on the Manchurian Incident weakened the League.

• Japan then withdrew from membership in March 1933.

• In October 1933 the failure of the Disarmament Conference became evident.
1933-35 The beginning of Rearmament

- Japan gave notice of her intention to resign from the League on 27 March 1933
- and in December 1934 of her intention to abandon the Washington Treaty;
- Subsequently, both Japan and the United States announced increases in their shipbuilding programs.

Yamato. The three Yamato class ships were the biggest battleships ever built.

Aircraft carrier Shokaku
May June 1933

• Hitler and his allies began to suppress the remaining opposition. The Social Democratic Party was banned and its assets seized.

• While many trade union delegates were in Berlin for May Day activities, SA stormtroopers demolished union offices around the country.

• On 2 May 1933 all trade unions were forced to dissolve and their leaders were arrested. Some were sent to concentration camps.

• By the end of June, the other parties had been intimidated into disbanding.

• This included the Nazis’ nominal coalition partner, the DNVP; with the SA’s help, Hitler forced its leader, Hugenberg, to resign on 29 June.

• On 14 July 1933, the NSDAP (Nazis) was declared the only legal political party in Germany.
1933 - 4

• In October 1933 Hitler withdrew Germany from the Disarmament Conference and the League of Nations claiming its disarmament clauses were unfair if they applied only to Germany.

• In a referendum held in November, 95 percent of voters supported Germany's withdrawal.

• In 1934, Hitler told his military leaders that a war in the east should begin in 1942.
June 1934

• The demands of the SA for more political and military power caused anxiety among military, industrial, and political leaders.

• In response, Hitler purged the entire SA leadership in the Night of the Long Knives, from 30 June to 2 July 1934.

• Hitler targeted Ernst Röhm and other SA leaders who, along with a number of Hitler's political adversaries (such as Gregor Strasser and former chancellor Kurt von Schleicher), were rounded up, arrested, and shot.

• About 90 people were shot.

• While the international community and some Germans were shocked by the murders, many in Germany believed Hitler was restoring order.
August 1934

- On 2 August 1934, Hindenburg died.
- The previous day, the cabinet had enacted the "Law Concerning the Highest State Office of the Reich". This law stated that upon Hindenburg's death, the office of president would be abolished and its powers merged with those of the chancellor.
- Hitler thus became head of state as well as head of government, and was formally named as Führer und Reichskanzler (leader and chancellor), although Reichskanzler was eventually quietly dropped.
- As head of state, Hitler became commander-in-chief of the armed forces. Immediately after Hindenberg's death, at the instigation of the leadership of the Reichswehr, the traditional loyalty oath of soldiers was altered to affirm loyalty to Hitler personally, by name, rather than to the office of commander-in-chief (which was later renamed to supreme commander) or the state.
- On 19 August, the merger of the presidency with the chancellorship was approved by 88 per cent of the electorate voting in a plebiscite.
German Rearmament

- In March 1935 the British White Paper on Defence Policy was published, announcing the decision to modernise defences; and
- the same month, March 1935, Germany announced
  - the official constitution of an air force and
  - the adoption of conscription to provide an army of 500,000 men.
- A few days later Hitler told the British Foreign Secretary in Berlin that Germany had already reached air parity with Britain.
- Under the Treaty of Versailles Germany was forbidden to raise an air force.

Sir John Simon, British Foreign Secretary 1931 to 7 June 1935
German Rearmament

• In June 1935 Germany proposed a naval agreement with Britain on the basis of a strength 35% of that of the British Fleet.
  • This offer was accepted by the British Government on Admiralty advice.
  • The treaty had the effect of authorising Germany to build to her utmost capacity for some years to come
  • and to build larger ships than Britain which was still adhering to the 35,000 ton limit on battleships.
  • This treaty validated construction of a fleet much bigger than the limits established by the Treaty of Versailles.

• There were important implications for Australia in this treaty.
  • As Mr Churchill pointed out at the time,
  • as one result of Germany's naval building the British battle fleet would be "largely anchored to the North Sea . . .
  • that means to say the whole position in the Far East has been very gravely altered."

• A pamphlet *Japan and the Defence of Australia*, published in 1935
  • noted the decline of British naval power and the danger of war in Europe,
  • considered it improbable that British naval aid would be available to Australia either immediately or eventually.
  • This led to warnings not to put a nation's trust in navies, but to rely on land forces and aircraft.
1936 - Collective Security

- In October 1935, Italian dictator Benito Mussolini invaded Abyssinia.
- The League condemned Italy's aggression and imposed economic sanctions in November 1935, but the sanctions were largely ineffective because without American involvement or a naval blockade they did not cut off oil supplies.
- On 23 June 1936, in the wake of the collapse of League efforts to restrain Italy's war against Abyssinia, the British Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, told the House of Commons that collective security had
  “failed ultimately because of the reluctance of nearly all the nations in Europe to proceed to what I might call military sanctions ... The real reason, or the main reason, was that we discovered in the process of weeks that there was no country except the aggressor country which was ready for war ... [I]f collective action is to be a reality and not merely a thing to be talked about, it means not only that every country is to be ready for war; but must be ready to go to war at once. That is a terrible thing, but it is an essential part of collective security.”
1936 - Development of the Axis

• The first step was the treaty signed by Germany and Italy in October 1936.

• On 18 November 1936 Japan recognised the Italian occupation of Ethiopia, in return Italy recognised the Japanese occupation of Manchuria.

• The next step was the signing in November 1936 of the Anti-Comintern Pact, an anti-communist treaty between Germany and Japan. Italy joined the Pact in 1937.
1936 - 7

• When the Italian invasion of Ethiopia led to only mild protests by the British and French governments, on 7 March 1936 Hitler used the Franco-Soviet Treaty of Mutual Assistance as a pretext to order the army to march 3,000 troops into the demilitarised zone in the Rhineland in violation of the Versailles Treaty.
  • As the territory was part of Germany, the British and French governments did not feel that attempting to enforce the treaty was worth the risk of war.

• Hitler sent military supplies and assistance to the Nationalist forces of General Franco in the Spanish Civil War, which began in July 1936. The German Condor Legion included a range of aircraft and their crews, as well as a tank contingent.

• When Japan began a full-scale invasion of China in 1937 the Chinese appealed to the League for help. Western countries were sympathetic to the Chinese but the League was unable to provide any actual help.

• The Italians withdrew from the League in December 1937.
March 1938 - The Anschluss

• The idea of an Anschluss (a united Austria and Germany that would form a "Greater Germany") began after the unification of Germany excluded Austria and the German Austrians from the Prussian-dominated German Empire in 1871.

• In 1918, the newly formed Republic of German-Austria attempted to form a union with Germany.

• but the Treaty of Saint Germain (10 September 1919) and the Treaty of Versailles (28 June 1919) forbade both the union and the continued use of the name "German-Austria"; and stripped Austria of some of its territories, such as the Sudetenland.

• Nazi Germany provided support for the Austrian National Socialist Party (Austrian Nazi Party) in its bid to seize power from Austria’s Fatherland Front government.

• The Fatherland Front was itself a corporatist, one-party fascist government.
March 1938 - The Anschluss

- On 9 March 1938, in the face of rioting by the small, but virulent, Austrian Nazi Party and ever-expanding German demands on Austria, Chancellor Schuschnigg called a referendum on the issue, to be held on 13 March.

- Hitler declared that the referendum would be subject to major fraud and that Germany would never accept it.

- Hitler sent an ultimatum to Schuschnigg on 11 March, demanding that he hand over all power to the Austrian Nazis or face an invasion.

- Realizing that neither France nor Britain was willing to offer assistance, Schuschnigg resigned on the evening of 11 March, but President Miklas refused to appoint the Nazi, Seyss-Inquart, as Chancellor.

- At 8:45 pm, Hitler, tired of waiting, ordered the invasion to commence at dawn on 12 March regardless.

- On the morning of 12 March, the German army crossed the border into Austria. The troops were greeted by cheering Austrians with Nazi salutes, Nazi flags, and flowers. Although the invading forces were badly organized and coordination among the units was poor, it didn’t matter because the Austrian government had ordered the Austrian army not to resist.

- That afternoon, Hitler, riding in a car, crossed the border. In the evening, he arrived at Linz and was given an enthusiastic welcome.
1938 - The Czech Crisis

- According to the February 1921 census, 3,123,000 native German speakers lived in Czechoslovakia—23.4% of the total population.

- High unemployment, and the imposition of Czech in schools and all public spaces, made people more open to extremist movements such as fascism and German irredentism.

- In the 1930s, the Sudeten German National Socialist Party (SdP) with its radical demands gained immense popularity among Germans in Czechoslovakia.

- After the Anschluss in March 1938 Sudeten Nazis, led by Konrad Henlein, agitated for autonomy.

- On 24 April 1938 the SdP, at Hitler’s urging, proclaimed the Karlsbader Programm, which demanded in eight points the complete equality between the Sudeten Germans and the Czech people.

- The government accepted these claims on 30 June 1938.
1938 - The Czech Crisis

• Hitler fomented violent unrest in Czechoslovakia and threatened invasion to protect the Sudeten Germans.

• The French, who had an alliance with the Czechs, and the British, who did not, were concerned to avoid a European war. They pressured the Czechs to accede to German demands.

• British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain met Adolf Hitler in Berchtesgaden on 15 September and agreed to the cession of the Sudetenland;

• three days later, French Prime Minister Édouard Daladier did the same.

• No Czechoslovak representative was invited to these discussions. Germany was now able to walk into the Sudetenland without firing a shot.
1938 - The Czech Crisis

• Chamberlain met Hitler again in Godesberg on 22 September to confirm the agreements.

• Hitler, aiming to use the crisis as a pretext for war, now demanded not only the annexation of the Sudetenland but the immediate military occupation of the territories, giving the Czechoslovak army no time to adapt their defence measures to the new borders.

• Hitler in a speech at the Sportpalast in Berlin claimed that the Sudetenland was "the last territorial demand I have to make in Europe“ and gave Czechoslovakia a deadline of 28 September at 2:00pm to cede the Sudetenland to Germany or face war.

• To achieve a solution, Italian dictator Benito Mussolini suggested a conference of the major powers in Munich and on 29 September, Hitler, Daladier and Chamberlain met and agreed to Mussolini’s proposal (actually prepared by Hermann Göring) and signed the Munich Agreement, accepting the immediate occupation of the Sudetenland.

• Czechoslovakia was informed by Britain and France that it could either resist Nazi Germany alone or submit to the prescribed annexations.
1938 - The Czech Crisis

• Later that day (29th September) Chamberlain went to Hitler and asked him to sign a peace treaty between the United Kingdom and Germany.

• After Hitler's interpreter translated it for him, he happily agreed.

• On his return to Britain, Chamberlain delivered his infamous "peace for our time" speech to crowds in London.

• On 5th October, in parliament, the Prime Minister (Lyons) expressed the appreciation of the people of Australia of "the great services rendered by Mr Chamberlain, President Roosevelt, and Signor Mussolini to the cause of peace."

British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, at Heston Aerodrome on 30 September 1938 after his meeting with Hitler. He is brandishing the peace agreement between Britain and Germany.
October 1938

- October 1938: Hitler is driven through the crowd in Cheb (German: Eger), in the mostly German-populated Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia, which had been annexed to Nazi Germany as part of the Munich Agreement. Bundesarchiv, Bild 137-004055 / CC-BY-SA 3.0
December 1938

• on 4 December 1938 there were elections in Sudetenland.

• 97.32% of the adult population voted for the NSDAP (Nazis).

• About a half million Sudeten Germans joined the Nazi Party which was 17.34% of the total German population in the Sudetenland (the average NSDAP membership participation in Germany was 7.85% in 1944).

• The Sudetenland was one of the most pro-Nazi regions of the Third Reich.

Election ballot, Reichsgau Sudetenland, December 1938
1939

• As a result of the annexation of the Sudetenland, Czechoslovakia lost much of its industry and its mountain defenses in the west. It left the rest of Czechoslovakia weak and powerless to resist subsequent occupation.

• On 15 March 1939 Germany invaded the remains of Czechoslovakia.

• The British Prime Minister, Mr Chamberlain, expressed the British resolution to oppose attempts to use the threat of force to oblige independent states to yield up their independence.

• On 31st March Britain and France guaranteed "all support in their power" to Poland in the event of any threat to that country’s independence. They also accepted military commitments to Rumania and Greece.
1939 - Development of the Axis

- 7th April 1939: Italian forces invaded and quickly subjugated Albania.
- The "Rome–Berlin Axis" became a military alliance on 22 May 1939 under the so-called "Pact of Steel"
1939

- In March 1939, Hitler demanded the return of the Free City of Danzig and the Polish Corridor, the strip of land that separated East Prussia from the rest of Germany.
  - Since 1936, Danzig’s Senate had a majority of local Nazis. Agitation to rejoin Germany was stepped up.
- On 28 April 1939, Hitler unilaterally withdrew from both the German-Polish Non-Aggression Pact of 1934 and the London Naval Agreement of 1935.
- On 23rd August Germany signed a pact of non-aggression with Soviet Russia.
- The German government announced on 29 August that it aimed not only for the restoration of Danzig but also the Polish Corridor (which had not previously been part of Hitler’s demands). It said that they were willing to commence negotiations, but demanded that a Polish representative with the power to sign an agreement had to arrive in Berlin the next day.
- On the night of 30/31 August, German Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop read a 16-point German proposal to the British ambassador. When the ambassador requested a copy of the proposals for transmission to the Polish government, Ribbentrop refused, on the grounds that the requested Polish representative had failed to arrive by midnight.
- When the Polish Ambassador went to see Ribbentrop later on 31 August to indicate that Poland was favorably disposed to negotiations, he announced that he did not have the full power to sign, and Ribbentrop dismissed him.
- It was then broadcast that Poland had rejected Germany’s offer, and negotiations with Poland came to an end.
1939 – War in Europe

• **1st September**: Polish cities were bombed and German troops crossed the frontiers of Poland and Danzig.

• **3rd September**: A British ultimatum to Hitler expired at 8 p.m. Eastern Australian time. At 8 p.m. short-wave wireless listeners throughout Australia heard the announcement by Chamberlain that Great Britain was at war with Germany.

• At 9.15 p.m. Mr Menzies announced:
  • “It is my melancholy duty to inform you officially that ... Great Britain has declared war upon Germany and that, as a result, Australia is also at war.”

Hitler watching German soldiers marching into Poland September 1939.
World War 2 Casualties

• Military deaths from all causes 21 million

• Civilian deaths
  • from military activities and crimes against humanity 29 million
  • due to war related famine and disease 19 million
What went wrong?

• Almost everything.

• One thing stands out to me.
  • The Nazis got into power by normal constitutional democratic processes.
  • There were three elections in 26 months at which the German electorate had the opportunity to vote against the Nazis.
  • After each election the majority of members of the Reichstag had the opportunity to form a viable majority government excluding the Nazis.
  • Estimates of total German deaths in the war range from 6.9 million to 7.4 million. The western half of Germany was burnt down by the RAF and the eastern half was raped and pillaged by the Red Army. These are examples of what policy people refer to as “unintended consequences” of decisions.

• It worries me that there is no one left with a memory of the horrible consequences that can flow from poor electoral decision making.

• Our parents knew about it, it had happened to them. Our grandparents knew about it, it had happened to them twice. They tended to make cautious electoral decisions.

• A number of previously respectable countries seem to be making extremely rash electoral decisions these days, presumably with the assumption that nothing seriously bad could happen as a result. I hope they are right but fear they are not.
For those with a general interest in What Happened Next:
War in the Pacific
Defending Australia
Campaigns in New Guinea and the Solomons
June 1942