

WORLD WAR TWO CAUSE AND EFFECT

By

BILL BRADY

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World War Two, Cause and Effect contains much to like, especially for those history buffs who thrive on detail. Mr. Brady's coverage of 'the greatest war in world history' includes coverage of land, sea and air forces, battles, material and troops. It also explores intricate details of the 'why' of WW2, its genesis in the treaty of Versailles and humiliation of the German people, and how Adolf Hitler took full advantage of that German feeling of marginalization.

The book tracks such arcana as the scuttling of the Graf Spee and its implications, Hitler's seeming passive-aggression in not destroying British troops at Dunkirk, the armament of various tanks and battleships and their vulnerability to shells and even the implications of commanders' decisions to attack civilians instead of fuel supplies.

The book avoids political cant, though it does show some long-term implications of certain political decisions by Truman, Churchill and others. Truman in using the 'A' bomb in opposition to Eisenhower who advised against it, for example. Churchill decided to help keep Russians fighting, thus diverting Germans from attacking England.

The weakness of the book may be its strength, that details take the place of sweeping narrative. Again, if military history is a reader's desire, those details will satisfy. This reader took issue with only a few items: the speculation about Vietnam and America's hesitation to cut its losses there in light of Pearl Harbor is a stretch. On page 89 the author might have used 'day of infamy,' instead of 'fateful day in history,' though either works. There are a few repeated phrases here and there, and the final two chapters seem to be an afterthought. All told a richly detailed, almost scholarly treatise on World War Two and its aftermath.

Byron Edgington

Author of *The Sky Behind Me, a Memoir of Flying and Life*.

About the Author

Bill Brady comes from a professional Engineering background and worked in senior management positions for companies such as Coca-Cola and General Electric. Following a successful career in these international companies, he subsequently established his own management consultancy, where he was engaged in various projects and assignments, not only in South Africa, but also in Zambia and Nigeria.

Bill then retired, but came out of retirement to join another international company and presently conducts specialised training in Operations Management and Finance at MBA level.

Bill always had a lifelong passion for history and having majored in that discipline, he developed a passion for the history of World War Two, in particular. Becoming a member of The South African Military History Society of Kwa Zulu Natal based in Durban. Bill rose to the position of Chairman; a position he still holds.

Bill presents papers on military history to professional bodies and academia on a regular basis. This compendium is a concatenation of the papers presented and as such is a valuable collection of many of the events, actions, battles and biographies of personalities of World War Two, making it an easy matter for both the serious and casual student of history to obtain an understanding of that particular aspect of history, without having to read a tome.

**They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning,
We will remember them.**

This book is dedicated in gratitude to my wife Kathleen for her tolerance.

We have been blessed with two lovely daughters, Lorraine and Michelle who have always been a source of great pride and joy.

We thank them for giving us wonderful grandchildren in Devin, Tayla, Chloe and Ava.

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Overview of World War Two from a South African Perspective

Hitler's rise to power in 1933 saw the repudiation of the Versailles Treaty, the re armament of Germany and the road to war. Nazi Germany invaded Poland in 1939 to launch the Second World War.

When British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain announced on Sunday September 3rd 1939 that Britain was at war with Germany, South Africa was once more divided. Prime Minister Hertzog opted for neutrality as he had done in 1914.

The cabinet was split; Deputy Prime Minister Smuts proposed that South Africa sever relations with Hitler's Third Reich and join the Allies. Hertzog's neutrality motion was defeated in Parliament by thirteen votes, Hertzog resigned. Governor General Sir Patrick Duncan invited Smuts to form a new government. On September 6th South Africa declared war on Nazi Germany.

1940: was a year of terrible disasters for the Allies.

The Germans invaded Denmark and Norway in April; the Anglo-French response was nothing short of a fiasco.

An even greater disaster fell in France when the Nazi's invaded the Low Countries and France in May, by-passing the Maginot Line. By this stage Winston Churchill had replaced Chamberlain as Prime Minister and steeled the people to continue the fight.

The "miracle of Dunkirk" saw three hundred thousand troops plucked from the beaches, but they lost all their equipment. Churchill flew to France to urge them not to give up, but the collaborators are in the majority. After Italy entered the war, the French surrendered.

Britain braced herself for invasion. Sea power was no longer the primary issue. It was airpower, and to achieve air superiority the Luftwaffe had to neutralise the RAF.

Many South Africans, including Sailor Malan with thirty five kills

came to Britain's rescue during the Battle of Britain. The Germans failed to gain air superiority and the invasion was cancelled. Churchill rallied the people with his famous speech, "We will fight them on the beaches, the landing grounds, in the fields in the hills and in the streets, and we shall never surrender!" The response to this was a rapturous applause in the House of Commons, and reinforced the bulldog spirit of the British people.

More than two million South Africans volunteered for service including one hundred and twenty thousand non whites.

1941: Heralded the intensification of the "Blitz."

Many British cities were flattened and the evacuation of children to South Africa is hastened. The Osewa Brandwag commits many acts of sabotage and attack service men in uniform.

Hitler launches his attack on Russia in June. This proved to be a terrible blunder, the Germans did not prepare for winter warfare.

U – Boats decimate British merchant shipping in the Atlantic; US President Roosevelt approves the Lend-Lease programme to help Britain survive.

General Smuts is promoted to Field Marshall on his 71st birthday; South African forces complete the conquest of the Italians in East Africa.

However, at Sidi Razegh in North Africa the South African 5th Brigade encountered strong enemy forces and were badly mauled by the Afrika Korps with over three thousand troops captured.

Robey Leibbrandt the former heavyweight boxing champion returns to South Africa as a German agent with orders to assassinate Prime Minister Smuts. He is betrayed, captured and sentenced to death for High Treason.

Imperial Japan delivers a devastating blow at Pearl Harbour on the 7th December 1941. Over three hundred and fifty aircraft from six Japanese carriers decimate the American Pacific Battle Fleet to inflict the worst military defeat on the United States in its two hundred year

history.

As predicted by Smuts; on the 10th of December, just three days after Pearl Harbour, HMS Prince of Wales and HMS Repulse are sunk off Malaya.

At the same time on the other side of the world, the Germans, after massive victories, suffer a severe reverse before the gates of Moscow.

1942: Started With a Series of Disasters for the Allies.

At Singapore on 15th February, the greatest ever defeat of British arms occurs when one hundred and thirty thousand British troops surrender to thirty thousand Japanese. The Americans capitulate in the Philippines and the Dutch in Indonesia.

South Africa earned the first of four Victoria Crosses of the Second World War when Squadron Leader John Nettleton led a raid of Lancaster bombers on Germany.

At Tobruk, Major General Klopper, surrenders with thirty thousand men, including ten thousand South Africans.

Durban and Pietermaritzburg are "blackened out" following sightings of Japanese sea planes.

The first thousand bomber raid is mounted by the RAF on Cologne; Colonel Doolittle bombs Tokyo and the US fleet sinks four Japanese aircraft carriers at Midway. South African troops invade Madagascar.

For the South African forces, the great event is at El Alamein where they fought with Montgomery's 8th Army in what Churchill described as the "End of the Beginning".

The second South African VC of the war is awarded to Sergeant Quentin Smythe of the Natal Carbineers for conspicuous valour at Alem Hanza in North Africa on 5th June 1942.

In November the Russians launch their counter attack at Stalingrad. The Anglo Americans land in North Africa.

The tide of war rapidly turns with the enemy forced onto retreat.

Tragically, outstanding South African General, Dan Pienaar is killed in an air crash on his way back to South Africa.

1943: The Year of Recovery for the Allies.

The German 6th Army surrenders at Stalingrad with the loss of a quarter million men. At Casablanca the Allied powers proclaim "Unconditional Surrender," and in May the Afrika Korps in Tunisia surrenders bringing the end to the war in Africa. Many South African troops arrive home on leave to a rousing welcome and Brigadier Evered Poole is promoted to Major General; Field Marshall Smuts wins the South African General election.

The U-Boats are defeated in the Atlantic and the Germans are defeated in the largest tank battle in Russia; the Allies invade Sicily in July and the Italian mainland in September. The air battle over Germany intensifies. Led by Wing Commander Guy Gibson VC of 617 Squadron, the "Dambuster Raid" with the specially designed "bouncing bomb", is a huge propaganda success.

Benito Mussolini is deposed in Italy and imprisoned, only to be rescued by Nazi special troops and flown to Germany; the German Battle Cruiser Scharnhorst is sunk off Norway, and the American "Island Hopping" campaign in the Pacific proves successful.

1944: A Decisive Year for the Allies.

By far the biggest event is the long awaited D-Day landings on 6th June to liberate Europe from the Nazi's. All South African radio stations are interrupted to announce the news.

Prime Minister Smuts visits troops in Italy. In the east the siege of Leningrad is lifted and the Russians regain most lost territory. The Allies, including the South African Armoured Division, become bogged down in Italy and the controversial bombing of Monte Cassino occurs.

Stories of German atrocities to Jews in concentration camps filter through to the West. British forces advance in Burma. An attempt is made on Hitler's life in July.

Paris is liberated in August. The V1 rocket is launched on London to

start the second blitz.

Field Marshall Montgomery's planned air drop at Arnhem (a bridge too far) is a disaster.

The V2 rocket is launched. Many South African airmen are killed in the relief of the Warsaw Ghetto, Poland

South Africa's 3rd VC is awarded to Lieutenant (later Captain) Gerard Norton of the Union Defence Force for his valiant attack on German machine gun positions in Italy.

Field Marshall Erwin Rommel commits suicide rather than face trial for the attempt on Hitler's life.

The popular band leader Glenn Miller is killed in an air crash.

The Germans are heavily defeated in the Battle of the Bulge in Belgium; many American prisoners are murdered.

1945: End of the War.

South African 6th Armoured Division makes rapid gains in Italy; the Allies cross the Rhine; the Russians cross eastern German border. Dresden is bombed, killing an estimated one hundred and fifty thousand civilians. Most concentration camps where six million Jews perished, are liberated.

On his return from an operation over enemy territory, South African Major Edwin Swales, of the elite Pathfinder Squadron is shot down in Belgium and awarded the VC posthumously.

USA President Roosevelt dies. Benito Mussolini is executed by Italian partisans.

Russian and Allied troops meet in Germany. Adolf Hitler commits suicide, and Berlin falls to the Russians.

Germany surrenders unconditionally and there are wild scenes of rejoicing in many South African towns and cities.

Two atomic bombs are dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, in August to bring an end to the war in the Pacific.

World War Two is over.

FOREWORD

An excellently researched document that is rich in factual detail. Even people who have never felt the need to delve into the history of World War Two would find the information of great interest. The writing is didactic and the facts could be used as mnemonics for the reader to conduct his or her own research.

The author has strengthened the historical detail by analysing the various strengths and weaknesses of some of the generals as well as analysing the strengths and weaknesses of the campaigns themselves. The author has also raised alternatives to the various actions in the form of "what ifs". This brings the reader into the present era, answering questions that the reader would indubitably raise upon reading the historical narratives.

The written style is derived directly from the style used by the author when presenting to a large and very erudite audience. Upon reading this document the reader should bear this in mind, as there might be information offered but not expanded upon due to the fact that the background to the information was taken and accepted by the audience, as read. In other words, the audience had some or even a great deal of knowledge about the event or events being written about. As such there is no prolix which results in concise information.

There is no doubt that the author has a most profound knowledge of the history of World War Two. His research has been prodigious; nonetheless he has taken pains to present the information in a manner to ensure that literally every member of the reading public would derive great pleasure in reading this compendium of information.

The work is a very valuable document which could take its place proudly among other works of World War Two.

Dr. Graham L. Coggin

~ONE~

THE 1938 MUNICH CRISIS



In September 1938 Britain and France in a desperate effort to avoid war, capitulated to Hitler at Munich by agreeing to give part of Czechoslovakia to the Third Reich. Hitler, despite this agreement, took the rest of Czechoslovakia in March 1939. The policy of appeasement championed by British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain lay in ruins.

The Munich Crisis arose from Hitler's territorial claims to regions with large German populations; an issue for which he was prepared to go to war; a war that the Anglo-French were determined to avoid at all costs. They were later to be derided for pursuing a policy of "Peace at any price".

Czechoslovakia was created out of the 1919 Treaty of Versailles. In hindsight it was inevitable that trouble would evolve between the various ethnic groups. This was especially true of the Sudeten Germans who resented living under the rule of foreigners; and demanded that the region be transferred to Germany. Hitler exploited this situation and increasingly made inflammatory speeches; declaring that Germans in Czechoslovakia be united with their homeland.

He demanded that all Germans be incorporated into one Reich,

stating that no German national should have to live outside Germany. Consequently, in 1938 he ordered his generals to plan for the invasion of Czechoslovakia. War seemed more and more likely.

The French government tried to forestall Hitler by declaring it would go to the aid of Czechoslovakia in the event of a German invasion. Realising the gravity of the situation, and desperate to solve the crisis without war, Chamberlain proposed to meet with Hitler.

Three meetings were to take place. At the first meeting in Berchtesgaden on September 15th 1938, Hitler agreed not to take any military action against Czechoslovakia. Chamberlain agreed that Sudetenland should be ceded to Germany and promised to persuade the French and Czechs to accept this decision.

The second meeting took place in Godesberg on September 22nd. Chamberlain expected the agreement to be formally signed by Hitler. Instead, Hitler presented Chamberlain with an "Ultimatum". Sudetenland was to be occupied by the German Army immediately and all Czechs evacuated. This was tantamount to a declaration of war and rejected by the British and French. The Czechs relied on military assistance from the French, but, Hitler knew the French would do nothing.

At this time the RAF was undergoing conversion from bi-planes to monoplanes which were not ready for combat. After Munich the Hurricanes and Spitfires that were later to win the Battle of Britain came into production. Chamberlain had a further dread; his military chiefs advised that over one million civilians would be killed by bombing raids in just two months. Mass graves would be needed and there was not enough wood for coffins. Taking all of this into consideration, it is not surprising that many people supported Chamberlain's efforts to achieve a negotiated settlement.

At the second meeting Britain and France felt compelled to prepare for war. On 23rd September, the Czech government ordered a general mobilisation; more than one million fully equipped troops were ready to repel a German attack. On 24th September, the French ordered a partial mobilisation, their first since World War One. Britain mobilised the Royal Navy, Europe was on the brink of war.

Mussolini intervened as mediator in an attempt to avoid war. He proposed that a four-power conference be convened immediately to settle the dispute.

Mussolini persuaded Hitler to hold a third meeting, and on 29th September Chamberlain flew to Munich. Germany, Britain, France and Italy were represented - Czechoslovakia was not. Neither was the Soviet Union, which greatly angered Stalin. Without consulting the Czechs, the four powers agreed that the Sudetenland should be given to Germany immediately.

The Munich Agreement, as it was known, was agreed to by the Western Powers on Hitler's terms. The German army was to complete the occupation of the Sudetenland by 10th October. It was almost identical to the "Ultimatum" submitted by Hitler to Chamberlain at the previous meeting. Such was the desire of the Allies to maintain peace at all costs and their total lack of resolve to halt Hitler's aggression. The Czech Government was informed by Britain and France that it could either resist Germany alone or submit. So much for the French assurance signed six months earlier, to go to the assistance of Czechoslovakia if invaded by Germany. Hitler had been proved right.

After the agreement was signed, Chamberlain went to Hitler and asked him to sign a peace treaty between Britain and Germany. Hitler happily agreed to sign what he later derided as Chamberlain's "Scrap of paper".

Chamberlain returned to London as a hero; triumphantly delivering his famous "Peace in our time" speech to ecstatic crowds. Imminent war had been avoided and Chamberlain was recognised as the man who had saved Europe. However, there were other reactions; the First Lord of the Admiralty, Duff Cooper, resigned in protest from the Cabinet. The Labour Party together with what was regarded as a diehard and reactionary element of the Conservative Party also opposed the agreement.

However, the Munich Agreement was enormously popular in the country for seemingly averting war, and a wave of perverse optimism swept across the country. Chamberlain; announcing on his return

that in his view the settlement of the Czechoslovakian problem, which has now been achieved, is only the prelude to a larger settlement in all Europe. Further stating, "This morning I had another talk with the German Chancellor, Herr Hitler, and here is the paper which bears his name upon it as well as mine. I believe it is peace for our time". Chamberlain actually believed that Hitler had been sincere.

Winston Churchill, on denouncing the Agreement in the House of Commons: "We have suffered a total and unmitigated defeat. It is a disaster of the first magnitude; we have sustained a defeat without a war".

Adolf Hitler stated in a speech to his generals; "Our enemies are little worms, I saw through them at Munich. Now Poland is in the position I desired. I am only afraid that some fool will again present me with a mediation plan at the last moment". He was determined to have his war.

On 15th March 1939 Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia and drove through Prague in triumph, thereby, dismissing claims he only wanted to bring Germans into the Reich. Chamberlain felt betrayed by the Nazi seizure of Czechoslovakia, and finally realised his policy of appeasement towards the dictator had failed. He immediately began to mobilise the British armed forces on a war footing. France did the same.

In April 1939 the British gave a public guarantee to Poland that were she to be attacked by Germany, Britain would go to war. Stalin, visibly upset by the results of the Munich conference, formed the opinion that the West had actively colluded with Hitler. This belief led the Soviet Union to alter its foreign policy towards Nazi Germany that eventually led to the signing of the Non-Aggression Pact in August 1939.

Although the Chamberlain Government had allowed Czechoslovakia to be abandoned and dismembered; it is claimed that the Munich agreement had bought Britain nearly a year to rearm. However, how accurate is this? It is a known fact that the subjugation of Czechoslovakia denied the Allies the Czech army consisting of thirty

seven divisions already mobilised. The Skoda works was the second most important arsenal in Europe that produced equivalent to the entire British armaments output.

Even more disastrous was the alteration in the relevant strength of the German and French armies. With every month that passed from Munich, the German Army not only increased in numbers but also in the quality of training. The French Army meantime suffered from a sapping of morale. The year's breathing space said to be gained by Munich left Britain and France in a much worse position compared to Germany's. In 1939 Nazi Germany's war expenditure was treble that of Britain and France combined. Finally there is the staggering fact that in a single year Hitler had annexed and brought under his control, seven million Austrians and four million Czechs. The balance had indeed turned in his favour.

Britain and France now faced the might of Nazi Germany whose armed forces were at the highest pitch of readiness for what was about to be unleashed. Due to the lack of resolve and pacifist attitudes of Allied Leaders, and the missed opportunities to call Hitler's bluffing, the world once again drifted towards a world war. Munich was the final opportunity to stop the approaching catastrophe that resulted in the death of some fifty million people.

The belief that security can be obtained by throwing a small state to the wolves is a fatal delusion.

~TWO~

OUTBREAK OF WORLD WAR TWO



World War Two was the most terrifying reality of modern times. It was the first global conflict to be fought with equal intensity in all parts of the world. It was fiercer and more destructive than any in history with domination of the world at stake.

Possibly, most people see the Second World War in rather simplistic terms. Hitler, Mussolini and Tojo started the war; they were the aggressors; and got exactly what they deserved. However, in history there are few genuine villains and even fewer genuine heroes.

Today, one can afford to take a less emotional look at the greatest war in all history and examine its causes with a more critical eye. This is mainly due to documents only recently being made available which cast new light on the once seemingly simple story of the good guys defeating the bad guys. It can no longer be argued that Hitler, and Hitler alone, caused the war in Europe, any more than it can be argued that Japan started the war in the Pacific. It is debatable that both Germany and Japan were provoked by the Western Powers.

The Germany of the Weimar Republic was a creation of the First World War; it was born out of defeat and humiliation. By 1933 the Weimar Republic was wholly discredited, blamed both for the Treaty of Versailles, that shackled Germany, and for the Great Depression.

Few Germans accepted the events of the final months of the First World War.

After four nightmare years, they would not believe that the German army had been beaten. After all Germany's frontier had not been crossed by enemy troops in action. Indeed, only a few months before the wars end, the German army had pushed back the Allied front to within forty miles of Paris. At that time, to the German civilian, victory seemed imminent. Then, inexplicably, General Ludendorf urged the Berlin government to make peace. The German public was shocked when on the eleventh hour on the eleventh day of the eleventh month the armistice to end the First World War came into effect in 1918.

Bismarck's second Reich had collapsed, betrayed by the so called "November criminals". To the masses, the German armies were not defeated in the field. They marched back into their own country with flags flying and bands playing after their long occupation of other countries, only to find that sailors and civilians had attempted a revolution whilst they had been fighting. The victorious powers then proceeded to strip Germany of territory and demanded payment of huge reparations.

This served Hitler and the Nazis purpose and they promoted the "stab in the back" propaganda. The Treaty of Versailles imposed upon Germany undoubtedly sowed the seeds of World War Two. Germany sought vengeance and this was given added stimulus when Hitler came to power in 1933. Hitler threw off the shackles of the Versailles Treaty, remilitarised the Rhineland, introduced conscription, annexed Austria and occupied Czechoslovakia. Hitler promised and provided jobs; he also eradicated most political rights and began harassment of the Jews.

Britain and France did not begin to stir until Hitler's troops re-occupied the Rhineland in March 1936. At this stage France alone had the capability of moving into the Rhineland and if she had done, so, Hitler would have backed down rather than face a confrontation. But France lacked the will. From this moment on, Hitler knew that the Western Democracies could be pushed. Only France believed in upholding the letter of the Treaty. Britain had no interest in the

Treaty, which she now considered unjust (in theory anyway).

When Hitler marched the Wehrmacht into Austria in March 1938, Britain and France merely complained and did nothing. As long as he confined his interests to Eastern Europe, they were more or less content to let him have his way. The annexation of the Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia was another matter. But Hitler argued that the people there were German-speaking and wanted union with Germany, which was true.

British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain had no intention of going to war, and the Munich Conference sealed the fate of Czechoslovakia. It is now known that if Britain and France had resisted, the German General Staff would have overthrown Hitler. But the Western Powers had allowed Czechoslovakia to be abandoned and dismembered. On 15th March 1939 in the aftermath of Munich, Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia and drove through Prague in triumph. Thereby, dismissing claims that he only wanted to bring Germans into the Reich. Millions of Slavs were unwillingly wedded to Germany, and Hitler's long-term goal of a German empire in the east was now evident.

This was a decisive moment for the West. Now it could no longer be argued that Hitler only wanted to bring Germans in Central Europe into his Reich. Herr Hitler was no longer considered a gentleman to be trusted. The policy of appeasement championed by Neville Chamberlain had failed. He felt betrayed by the Nazi seizure of Czechoslovakia. The will of Britain stiffened and with it the resolve of France, who was pledged to defend most of the states of Eastern Europe. The British began to mobilise on a war footing. The French did the same.

With Austria and Czechoslovakia now in his hands, Hitler turned to Poland. It was intolerable to him that the German province of East Prussia on the Baltic was separated from the rest of the Reich by a corridor that gave Poland its only access to the sea at Danzig.

When Hitler began his demand for the return of German Danzig, then under the League of Nations authority as a free city, Britain began to talk to the nation that she feared as much as Germany, the

Soviet Union. But Stalin saw at once that Britain's tentative steps towards a Russian alliance were not sincere, and soon began covert negotiations with his bitter ideological enemy.

Hitler read the situation correctly and initiated a brilliant diplomatic counter stroke which completely outwitted the Western Allies. Neither the Axis powers nor the democracies could engage in war without reaching some prior understanding with Russia. Most importantly, he was in a position to offer Stalin something that Britain and France could not, "half of Poland".

Hitler knew that Stalin wanted a defensive buffer of foreign soil between the Soviet Union and Germany and this could be provided with the partition of Poland. Hitler was aware that the Soviet Union clearly controlled the balance of power in Europe, and moved decisively and speedily to conclude the Nazi – Soviet non-aggression pact. The two political antagonists had joined hands. Germany was now free to attack the west without fear from the east thus avoiding a war on two fronts as predicted in "Mein Kampf".

The war clouds now gained momentum; Hitler had hoped that the pact would have shocked Britain and France into repudiating their pledges to Poland. He boasted that all the Western Powers would do is to recall their ambassadors when he attacked Poland. They would never go to war now that the situation was altered.

He was wrong! War broke out on 1st September 1939 with the German attack on Poland. On the evening of 2nd September Chamberlain addressed the House of Commons. MP's expected to hear that war had been declared. Instead Chamberlain said that if the German government would agree to withdraw their troops from Poland, the British government would forget everything that had happened, and diplomacy could start again. Chamberlain sat down in dead silence. The Prime Minister had merely expressed his grief at Poland's fate, not promised direct action. The House was outraged and Chamberlain was warned that he would be out of office if war were not declared. The very men who had applauded Munich now insisted on war. The cabinet met late at night and resolved that an ultimatum should be sent to Germany. The British ultimatum was delivered in Berlin at 9 a.m. on 3rd September. The German

government made no reply, and the ultimatum expired at 11am. War was declared. The French followed suit at 5 pm.

What all Europe had dreaded for the previous twenty years was about to happen again. Unlike in 1914, the outbreak was not greeted with patriotic hysteria. People could remember only too well the awful carnage and were fearful of the threat of mass aerial bombing. In 1939 the situation was accepted soberly, with the realisation that Hitler was a cancer within Europe which must be eradicated before peace could be achieved.

The German blitzkrieg in the east coupled with the sitzkrieg in the west, quickly subdued Poland, especially after the Russians in accordance with the non-aggression advanced into Poland. At sea the situation was very different. Here there was no sitzkrieg. On the very first day of hostilities, the liner 'Athenia' was sunk with large loss of life. Two more early disasters were encountered when the aircraft carrier 'Courageous' was sunk. This was followed by the sinking of the battleship 'Royal Oak' at Scapa Flow the following month.

The priority of the army was to transport the BEF troops across the channel. This was duly accomplished under the command of General Lord Gort, a distinguished guardsman who had been awarded the VC in World War One. More than one hundred and fifty thousand men, vehicles, and supplies were moved to bases on the Franco Belgium border.

Was the outbreak of war really necessary? It is possible that Hitler intended to conquer Europe at some time. It is also possible that the British government intended at some time to resist him. But it was neither of these intentions that caused the actual outbreak of war. In September 1939 Hitler merely wanted Danzig and the corridor, and Chamberlain wanted to give them to him. These plans were wrecked first by Polish obstinacy and then by the indignation of the House of Commons.

It is a fact that most countries were pushed into war. The Poles had no choice. The French were dragged along by the British. The Russians and Americans, both mighty boasters, declared it was a

crusade against Fascism. However, they had waited until attacked. Only the British and Empire people went to war of their own free will. They were not concerned about Fascism.

Although Britain and France reluctantly declared war against Germany in September 1939 they did not wage it in defence of Poland. They went to war out of national pride and for the sake of national honour and ultimately played a major role in bringing Hitler down. There are many lessons to be learned from the Second World War, but perhaps the most important is this: The horrors of cities destroyed, mass murder and genocide, atomic warfare, concentration camps, death marches, starvation, occupation and human degradation of an unparalleled nature, could all have been avoided.

In order to avoid the tragedy of the First World War, the Western Powers tried to ignore what was happening in Europe and Asia until it was almost too late. The legacy of appeasement which itself was the legacy of the First World War hung like a pall over the West. That war seemed to achieve nothing, and with so many millions of lives lost, it seemed insane to repeat the error. Even as late as May 1940 there were still those in Britain who favoured a policy of accommodation with the new German order. However, the appointment of Churchill rather than Lord Halifax as the replacement for Churchill finally put an end to any thought of appeasement.

It was this disillusionment and horror of war that blinded the West to the threat Hitler posed. By trying to pretend that aggression was not really aggression, that events in far-off countries about which they 'knew nothing' did not concern them. By callously ignoring human suffering, the Western democracies themselves were forced to suffer.

It can only be hoped that this lesson, lost on the generation who did not want to repeat the First World War, is not lost on the generation which does not want to repeat the tragedy and horror of the Second World War.