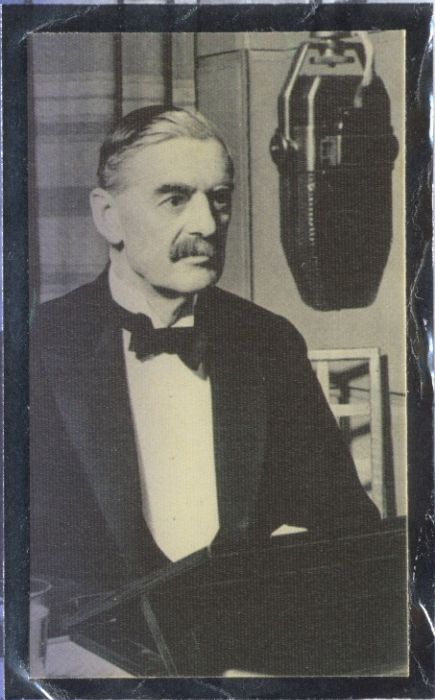


1939

# WWII

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GREAT BRITAIN AT WAR · 60th  
ANNIVERSARY  
OF THE START OF  
WWII  
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## THE START OF WORLD WAR II

The second World War was, in effect, a continuation of the 'Kaiser's War of 1914-1918'; Germany's second attempt to achieve their national aspiration - the leadership of Europe.

The treaty of Versailles had taken away all Germany's colonies, given back Alsace-Lorraine to the French, made Danzig a free city and left the Allies in the Rhineland. Failure to pay the heavy reparations of £6,000,000,000 led to the occupation of the Ruhr in 1923. As Marshal Foch commented after the Versailles Treaty, "This is not Peace. It is an Armistice for twenty years".

The steps taken that led to the start of World War II were clearly marked. Its origins go no further back than to January 1933 when Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany. His long-term plans were expounded on 5th November 1937, when he stated to his principal ministers that Germany must have more territory and that it was necessary to take it by force. In 1936 Germany had accelerated the pace of conscription and had broken the Locarno Agreement, which guaranteed existing frontiers and renounced the use of force. Hitler then reoccupied the Rhineland, deliberately chancing war, yet gambling that nothing would be done by the peace-loving French and British.

The Anschluss with Austria followed, which stirred up little

resentment. The dismemberment of Czecho-Slovakia took place in 1938-39. Throughout all this, British and French politicians, with the notable exception of Winston Churchill, strove for and continued to believe in peace. In Britain, only token rearmament had been made by the time of the Rhineland crisis and it was not until 1938 that war with Germany became a serious matter for the planners. Staff talks between the British and French forces did not begin until March 1939.

Germany took Bohemia and Moravia under her protection in March 1939 and seized Memel, the chief port of Lithuania. Hitler denounced his non-aggression pact with Poland and his naval agreement with Britain. He made his 'Pact of Steel' with Mussolini and signed the non-aggression 'Moscow Pact' with Russia on 23rd August. The British reacted by signing the 'Anglo-Polish Defence Alliance' on 25th August.

Hitler did not take the British intentions seriously, being convinced that war with Poland could be localised and that the British and French would stand aside as usual if war were threatened. On 1st September 1939 Germany invaded Poland, but the time had come for the British to stand up to Hitler. At 11am on 3rd September Britain's ultimatum to Hitler was ignored and so Great Britain and Germany went to war for the second time.