

Appeasement Fails

Main Idea Other European nations stood by as Germany expanded its territory.

Reading Focus How do you deal with bullies? Is it better to stand up to them or give them what they want? Read on to find out how Europe's leaders dealt with Adolf Hitler's demands.

One reason Adolf Hitler was popular in Germany was because he criticized the Treaty of Versailles. Many Germans believed the treaty was unfair. Hitler promised in his speeches that he would no longer obey the treaty.

The Treaty of Versailles kept Germany's military forces small. Hitler, however, insisted that this was unfair. In March 1935, he stated that Germany would build a new

air force and increase the size of its army. The Treaty of Versailles had also declared that no German troops could be in the **Rhineland**, a German territory west of the Rhine River along the French border. In 1936 Hitler ordered troops into the Rhineland.

France wanted to expel the German troops from the Rhineland, but the French government would not act without British help. Britain did not want to use force against Germany. Instead, British leaders chose a policy of **appeasement** (uh•PEEZ•muht). Appeasement is the idea that if you meet another government's demands, you can avoid war.

Hitler gained a close ally in Italy's Benito Mussolini. In 1935 Mussolini sent Italian forces to invade the African nation of Ethiopia. Britain and France opposed



the invasion but took no military action to stop it. Hitler, however, threw his support to Mussolini.

Next, the two dictators intervened in Spain. From 1936 to 1939, a civil war divided that country. Germany and Italy helped a Spanish military leader, General Francisco Franco, overthrow Spain's new republic. Soon after, Italy and Germany formed an alliance.

Next, Hitler turned to Austria. He insisted that Austria, a German-speaking country, should be part of Germany. In March 1938, he sent troops into Austria and took it over.

Hitler then turned to Austria's neighbor, Czechoslovakia, and demanded that the Czechs give Germany the **Sudetenland** (soo•DAY•tuhn•LAND), an area in western Czechoslovakia where many Germans lived. Czechoslovakia was ready to fight to keep the Sudetenland, but Britain and France preferred to negotiate. In September 1938, European leaders met in the German city of **Munich** (MYOO•nihk).

At the Munich Conference, Britain and France agreed to give the Sudetenland to Germany. Hitler, in turn, promised not to expand Germany's territory further. The British prime minister, **Neville Chamberlain** (NEHV•uhl CHAYM•buhr•luhn), returned home and declared that there would be "peace in our time."

Hopes for peace were smashed the following year. In March 1939, German forces took over western Czechoslovakia and set up a Nazi-friendly state in the eastern part. Hitler then demanded control of Danzig, a German city inside Polish territory. In response, Britain promised to support Poland if the Germans invaded.

Reading Check Analyze Why did British and French leaders appease Hitler?

The War Begins

Main Idea World War II began when Germany invaded Poland in September 1939, leading France and Britain to declare war.

Reading Focus Have you ever had to do something really difficult? What helped you to do it? Read to learn how the British endured defeats and German bombings.

In the summer of 1939, Hitler prepared to invade Poland. He worried, however, that such an attack would anger Stalin because Poland bordered the Soviet Union. Though bitter enemies, Hitler and Stalin signed a treaty in August 1939 in which they promised not to attack each other. They also agreed to divide Poland between them. This agreement freed Hitler to attack Poland.



▲ This photo shows a Czech woman weeping as she salutes invading German troops. **What happened after Britain and France gave the Sudetenland to Germany?**