

William Tyler - Europe on the Edge of War

- William, I'm going to hand over to you as... Running past the hour, looking forward. Thank you.

- Okay, okay.

- [Wendy] Welcome everybody.

- Okay, can everyone hear me?

- [Judi] Yes, are you good to go, William?

- Yes, I will start then. So welcome everyone. It's evening here in Worthing and it's a very nice spring, sunny day, and I've enjoyed a walk on the beach and it's been lovely. Now, I'm going to talk about the path to war in 1940. So let me begin by saying this. Let me take you back to Sunday, the 3rd of September, 1939, and to take you to Berlin. And the time? Shortly after 11:00 AM Central European Time. Well, that is what Sir Neville Henderson wrote in his book, 'Failure of A Mission.' Sir Neville Henderson was the British Ambassador to Germany and he wrote of that Sunday morning, "Shortly after 11:00 AM, "I received a final message from Ribbentrop," who was the German foreign minister, "asking me to call upon him at once. "I did so at 11:30. "And he lost no time in giving me, "on this occasion, "a lengthy document to read, "beginning with a refusal "on the part of the German people "to accept any demands "in the nature of an ultimatum made "by the British government, "and stating that any aggressive action "by England would be answered with "the same weapons in the same form. "The rest of the document was pure propaganda." Henderson continues his account of that morning.

"My only comment on reading "this completely false representation events was, ""it will be left a history ""to judge where the blame really lies." "Ribbentrop's answer was to the effect "that history had already proved the facts, "and that nobody had striven harder "for peace and good relations with England "than Herr Hitler had done. "His last remark to me was "he wished me well personally, "to which I could only reply "that I deeply regretted the failure "of all my efforts for peace, "but I bore no grudge against the German people." The message is relayed to London. And back in London, the Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, broadcast to the British people, of course, over the radio in those days. And Chamberlain said, "This morning, "the British ambassador in Berlin handed "the German government a final note stating "unless we heard from them by 11 o'clock "that they were prepared at once "to withdraw their troops in Poland, "a state of war would exist between us. "I have to tell you now "that no such undertaking has been received "and that consequently, "this country is at war with Germany."

Later that same day, France declared war on Germany. How had it come to this point? Following a turn of phrase first used by the novelist, HG Wells, of the First World War, that war had been described by Wells as "the war to end all wars." A phrase that was enthusiastically taken up by American president, Woodrow Wilson, along with the other catchphrase that Wilson

also used, "The war was to make the world safe for democracy." How had it come to this a second time in a generation? So my topic for today is to attempt to answer this question. How did we land up only 20 years on from the end of the bloodiest and costliest war in the history of the world in going to war again and against the same enemy? Although, I'm reminded that Marshal Foch, the French commander, and indeed commander-in-chief in 1918, at the armistice of November 1918, had said, "This is not a peace. It is an armistice that will only last 20 years." How right Foch was. But I want to begin by trying to answer the question as to the root of the problem of why we should be at war with Germany in 1939.

And the obvious answer is 1933, when Hitler took power with the Nazi Party in Germany. Or if you don't like 1933, then 1936 when Hitler invaded the Rhineland against the Treaty of Versailles, and Britain and France simply let him. But I think the roots go further back than 1930s. You can, with hindsight, I think go back to the peace of 1919 and the treatment of Germany as it struggled to establish a modern democratic state under the Weimar constitution. It was unwise the way that the Allies dealt with Germany, although Woodrow Wilson had pointed that out to both Lloyd George and Clemenceau. And in the end, it was totally self-defeating. Hitler and the Nazis were to use this situation powerfully to attack the weakness of German democracy. And moreover, the Nazis levelled a further argument about Germany's defeat in 1918. They called it "the stab in the back." The great German army had never been defeated by the Allies, but was undermined by the German home front by a mixture of socialists and republicans, but especially, said Hitler, by the Jews.

And what did Britain and France do in 1933? What did the establishment, the political establishment and the wider social establishment, in both countries do? Ignore it. They wanted to hope for the best but in their heart of hearts, I think many of them knew that that might not happen. In an article in The Independent newspaper in Britain, we read in 1933, "When Germany started building concentration camps, Edward, Prince of Wales," later King Edward VII, later still the Duke of Windsor, "allegedly told his German relative, Prince Louis Ferdinand of Prussia, "that it was no business of ours," that is Britain, "that it was no business of ours "to interfere in German's internal affairs, "either re: Jews or anything else." And that was 1933. He went on to say, "Dictators are very popular these days. "We might want one in England before long." The establishment on both sides of the channel was riven through if not with pure fascism, and the argument trundles on about Edward and Wallace Simpson and how fascist they were, but fellow travellers. If you don't like to refer to some of the establishment in both countries as fascists, then they're fellow travellers.

So we can take the story then back to 1918/19 in the search for the roots of the events that led to Sunday, the 3rd of September, 1939. But many historians take the story further back to 1870, or at least, 1890. 1870, which saw the most powerful German state, Prussia, defeat France in the Franco-Prussian war of that year, and go on, via its Chancellor, Bismarck, to proclaim a united Germany for the first time, and ironically to proclaim it in the Hall of Mirrors in the Palace of Versailles outside of Paris. Many argue, and I would be amongst them, that Bismarck's territorial ambitions in Europe had ended by 1871, and it was only 20 years later, in 1890, when

he was dismissed by the young Kaiser Wilhelm II... And oddly, a Kaiser with a British mother and a German father. It was only when the Kaiser dismissed Bismarck that the Second Reich began a military buildup that was the lead to the First World War in 1914. You may ask, why am I talking about these events long before the 1930s? Why is it relevant?

It's relevant because of the fear that a united Germany has in Europe, that a united Germany will dominate the continent of Europe. And many argue that the position of Germany within Europe, that is to say within the European Union today, is a matter of some concern. When we reach the point of reunification of Germany in October 1990, both the British ambassadors in the east and the west of Germany sent a report to Downing Street. The British ambassador in the East wrote, "Germany is again in the ascendant "with the scars of 1933 to '45 "still vivid in many memories. "This is not surprisingly core concern "in other parts of Europe." To which the British Ambassador in West Germany added, "Twice bitten, thrice vigilant, "Germany's neighbours naturally wonder "how far the Germans have really changed since 1945, "and whether following unification "there will be another shift "in the behaviour of a nation that "so often has proved volatile. "What will sovereign united Germany be like?"

But they concluded, "There is no reason "to expect reversion to the behaviour "which caused two world wars." Mrs. Thatcher, prime minister at the time, was less sanguine, and she's reported to have had a conversation in Moscow with Gorbachev the previous year, in 1989, shortly before reunification, in which she said to Gorbachev that "German unification would lead "to a change to post-war borders, "and we cannot allow that "because such a development would undermine "the stability of the whole international situation "and could endanger our security." Well, so far, so good. And young people would say, "What on earth are you going on about? "Germany is democratic, "has been since 1945." No, it hasn't. East Germany was not democratic in 1945. Germany has been democratic for a matter of decades since the fall of the Wall and the brief... And the brief period of the Weimar Republic between the end of the First War and the assumption of power by Hitler in '33. There is a fear, maybe more pronounced in Britain than in the rest of Europe, but certainly present in other parts of Europe, that Germany is still feared, or the possibility of Germany is still worrying.

And the advance of the new right in Germany is a cause of major concern. In a recent book that's been published, called "Blood and Iron" by Katja Hoyer, "Blood and Iron" is the story the Second Reich, that is Wilhelm's Reich, and in that book, she concludes, in her final paragraph, this, "The German Empire did not fall..." 1918, "Did not fall to visions "of democracy or socialism, "neither was it brought down "by the German people or the Allies. "The system fell because "it was flawed from the outset, "built on foundations of war, not fraternity. "The maintenance of national unity required "a diet of conflict, "the constant hunger for which grew "until catastrophe loomed in 1914. "The German Empire had come full circle. "It ended where it had started: "in blood and iron." And that paragraph applies just as much to the Third Reich as it does to the Second Reich. If you studied this period at university or you've studied fascism, you are often given the question, "Is Nazism fascist or not?" And if you compare it to Mussolini's Italy, it's very different. Mussolini actually had economic and social policies.

The Nazis only had policies which were geared towards war, exactly what Katja is saying about the Second Reich. And so, people are jumpy about Germany, even post-1945. So this is important to understand Germany. So we move forward to that dreadful year, in hindsight, of 1933. It opened explosively in Germany, with President Hindenburg appointing Adolf Hitler as chancellor on the 30th of January. Hindenburg is an interesting person. I had a friend, no longer with us, called Ava, and Ava was a student of mine at the City Lit in London. Ava was German and Jewish, and she got out just before the war began. And Ava told me that she was a child... I mentioned Hindenburg in a lecture and she said, "Oh, I met him." And I thought, "Met him? "A Jewish girl?" And she said, "Well, I was a little girl "and I got lost on the edges "of the Black Forest." She was quite tiny, she said. And she got lost, and was crying because she couldn't find her way home. And this very nice, elderly gentleman came, and took her hand, and took her out of the forest to put her on the path to go home, and it was Von Hindenburg.

The story is interesting in all so many ways. How does a country like Germany, which in the 19th century had been... Had some of the most liberal thinkers in Europe, one of the best, if not the best, educated population in Europe, perhaps in the world, how could it descend, in 1933, to the horrors of Nazism? And how could a nation where the future president of Germany help a little Jewish girl who got lost in the woods, how could it develop into a nation that perpetrated the genocide of the Jewish people? It's one of those questions which is very difficult to answer. And the truth of the matter is that, given certain circumstances anywhere in the most democratic, most civilised of countries, civilization is not very deep. It can be smashed at any time. And that's one of the big lessons of the Nazis coming to power. And I'm often asked as a historian, "William, what is the main event "that you would point to, "the biggest event, of the 20th century?" And it is 1933 and the taking of power by Hitler and the Nazis. And taking it not by force of arms, they tried that and failed. In the Munich Beer Hall Putsch, they failed. But taking it by using the democratic processes, by using them.

Well, we haven't had anything similar at the extent of what's happened in Germany in the wider western democratic world, although the Trump presidency in America gave us an awful glimpse of what might so easily happen in an advanced democratic country. And so that's why this year of 1933 is so appalling, and the 30th of January, the very moment when it all begins, 28 days later, there's the Reichstag fire, allowing Hitler, by decree! By decree as chancellor to begin the restriction of civil liberties across Germany. By the 23rd of March, Hitler had obtained, this time via legislation in the Reichstag, the Enabling Act, which in effect made him the dictator of Germany. Before we reached the summer of 1933, Germans are told not to... Germans are told to boycott Jewish-owned shops and businesses. German trade unions were outlawed. The Luftwaffe was formed in secret because under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, it was not allowed. By the year's end of 1933, all political parties other than the Nazi Party were banned, and Germany had left the League of Nations.

We may now be critical of the League of Nations as having no teeth, but as the former British Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, has written of the United Nations, which is also accused of not

having enough teeth, "It's the best we've got." But you need to keep everybody on board, whoever they are, if such an organisation is going to work. And Germany unilaterally withdrew before the end of 1933. For those with eyes to see, Germany had, under Hitler in 1933, already embarked on a path that was to lead to the horrors of war, the horrors of genocide, and every conceivable horror you can think of to be committed by this militaristic Nazi state between 1933 and 1945. And the West, its politicians, that is to say the two great democracies of France and Britain, remained silent, as indeed did America. Although America has withdrawn into its traditional fallback position of isolationism after Woodrow Wilson's attempt to involve America firmly in the League of Nations, which Congress did not agree to in 1919. And so, nobody stands up. If you're going to stand up to wrong, you've got to stand up immediately. I don't know about any of you who are listening to me, but in the 1980s here in Britain, those of us who were in education received a lot of training in terms of racism.

And if you were in a senior management position, you were instructed that you had to stand up to it wherever you saw it. You couldn't just say, "Oh, it's not offended anyone." "It doesn't really matter." "Very few people heard it." You were instructed, in a sense, you must challenge it. And the Western allies did not challenge Hitler in 1933 as civil liberties declined across Germany, and he's clearly a threat, and he's clearly breaking the Treaty of Versailles. Why? Because they simply couldn't contemplate the horror of another war. Many of the leaders in the '30s had fought in that war. In Britain, most of our political leadership had fought in that war, and they really didn't want to go back to it. And so... And so, they kept quiet for fear of offending Hitler, and they convinced themselves, or attempted to convince themselves, that what Hitler said, Hitler meant. In 1933, the Prince of Wales, later Edward VIII, Duke of Windsor, was recorded on film, teaching our present queen, age 12, to do the Nazi salute.

And we didn't know that until this century, but the film exists. And at the time, people... Many, at least of the establishment, would not have thought it odd. It's been very well documented, not least by himself, that Churchill's views of Nazism and of Hitler were present from the moment that Hitler took power in 1933. Churchill was clear that there were two forces unleashed in the world after 1933 that were the enemies of democracy. One was Nazism and the other was, to use Churchill's word, Bolshevism. Marxist-Leninism in Russia. What perhaps a lot of people don't realise is that Churchill actually spoke out against Nazism before Hitler took power as early as 1930, three years before that critical date. In the middle of September 1933, the British press were reporting that the German elections had returned the Nazi Party as the second party in the Reichstag, in the parliament, the socialists having the biggest majority, and that 6.4 million Germans had voted for the Nazi Party in the elections of the Reichstag in 1930. Hitler gave an interview in 1930 with The Times of London, and he explained to The Times that the Nazi Party was "not out for a bloody revolution."

He went on to assure his interviewer from The Times, "We will conquer political power "by strictly legal means." A few days after giving the interview to The Times, he gave a speech to something like 30,000 Nazi Party members in Germany itself. And he described, in that meeting, the electoral process as "The battle for a new German soul "and national spirit." He

said that the recent election, in which Nazi Party had come second, was "merely a milestone on the road towards "their final goal," which he said was "the radical reformation of Germany "by legal means." And so, politicians in France and Britain said, "Look, we told you, "there's nothing to worry about. "We may not like the man "but he's saying the right things "and the Germans have voted for him, "it's not for us to interfere." But Churchill had seen through this in 1930. On the 19th of October, 1930, after the Reichstag elections in the September, Churchill met Prince Bismarck, a descendant of the great Bismarck. Prince Bismarck was a German official at the German Embassy in London. This is under the Weimar government. And he met him, the two discussed current events.

Churchill was always meeting people of influence to find out what was going on in the world, if you like. He's on the backbenches without power. And they talked apparently about Hitler and the rise of the Nazi Party. And Churchill talked about Hitler having said that he wouldn't wage a war of aggression, but Bismarck noted in his diary, "Churchill was convinced that Hitler, "or his followers, would seize "the first available opportunity "to resort to armed force." One month after the Nazi Party became the second party in Reichstag, Churchill has nailed it. Bismarck went on to document the conversation and he thought it was so important, he sent it to the Weimar Foreign Ministry in Berlin. And the senior counsellor at the German embassy in London attached a note to Bismarck's report, which said, "Although one should "always here bear in mind Winston Churchill's "very temperamental personality "when considering his remarks, "they nevertheless deserve particular attention." And Bismarck himself concluded, "As far as can be humanly foreseen, "Churchill will play an influential role "in any Conservative government "in years to come." 1930. Don't anyone ever tell me that awareness of the danger of Nazism and of Hitler could not be seen as they seized power, because Churchill had seen it three years before. And Churchill's fears were proving well-grounded by 1933, and as 1933 turned into 1934.

On the 30th of June, 1934, is the Night of The Long Knives, as it's called, when potential rivals to Hitler within the Nazi Party were murdered by the SS and the Gestapo. This is not democracy in any way that we know it. This is authoritarian rule, and authoritarian rule of a beastly nature. And by the summer of 1934, you could not ignore it unless you choose to bury your head, like the ostrich, in the sand and pretend all is well. "I can't see it. "I don't want to see it. "No, no, I can't see anything. "Everything's fine." At the beginning of August, 1934, Hindenburg had died and Hitler made himself Fuhrer, combining the office of President of Germany and Chancellor of Germany. And now, the path, which we know is going to be followed, is really clearly in sight. 1935 comes. 1935 is the year when the Nazis began to believe they could do pretty well what they wanted because neither France nor Britain would intervene. Riddled through by appeasement, in France by fascism as well, fear of another war, and fascism in Britain. Don't forget Oswald Mosley. And what does Britain do? On the 18th of June, 1935, Britain signs a treaty with Hitler's Germany, the so-called Anglo-German Naval Agreement, where Britain allowed Germany officially to build a fleet of 35% of the tonnage of the British fleet.

It totally broke the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. Why did we deal? Appeasement. It's like dealing with a naughty little child. "You can have this toy, "but you're not going to have "the one

you've wanted. "You are not having this toy costing £100. "You can have this toy costing £35," in the hope that the child will forget about the a £100 toy and accept the £35 pound toy. That the Germans will accept 35% of British tonnage for their feet, and not wish for 100... Well, wish for a 100% plus. In retrospect, it looks ludicrous. It looks totally ludicrous. But to the majority of people, it seemed fine. Oh, and in 1936, Hitler goes on a global charm offensive with the Olympic Games. The Winter Games, and then followed by the Berlin Summer Games, and many people are taken in by this, including the English socialite and diarist whose full diary has now been published in volume one. There's going to be three volumes of Chips Channon.

And a review of his diary, which is coming out presently in Britain, says this, "Chips Channon's enthusiasm for Hitler was "extreme and idiotic. "Channon wrote, "He is always right. ""The greatest diplomat of modern times."" How could they? Channon truly change his mind later on. The review of his diaries say, "This stomach-turning infatuation "with Hitler reached a peak "with the closing ceremony "of the Berlin Olympics. "Channon wrote, "The orchestra played, Hitler rose, ""the great torch faded out. ""The crowd, 140,000 strong, ""sang 'Deutschland Uber Alles' ""with arms up lifted. ""There was a shout, a speech or two." "Night fell, and the Olympic games, "the great German display of power "and bid for recognition was over." And as the review said, Channon fell for it. But he isn't the only one that fell for it. Blinded, in the 1930s, the leadership in both the great democracies of Europe, 1936 is the final warning to France and Britain that the Third Reich, like the Second Reich, is hellbent on war. For the year of 1936 saw the Wehrmacht walk into the Rhineland in total violation of the Treaty of Versailles, and France and Britain simply stood aside.

Daniel Todman, in his book, "Britain's War, 1937-41..." And incidentally, I put a blog on earlier today and you can see some of the books I've used on that blog, and some others, and this is what Todman writes. "On the 7th of March, "Hitler's troops march into the Rhineland, "a key industrial area in western Germany, "demilitarised after 1918 "to allow the French an easy invasion route "into their old enemy "in the event of another war. "Here was another direct challenge "to the terms of Versailles, "but one that neither the French "nor the British governments was minded "to oppose by force of arms." And there were so few German troops he sent in that had the French sent troops in, Hitler said afterwards "The Germans had..." The German army "had orders to withdraw "and not face a fight." The German military were not prepared for war in 1936. We could have made a stand. Would it have made any difference? Well, you can argue until, as we say, the cows come home, and I don't know that there's an answer to that. I guess, personally, nothing would've stopped Hitler.

But we didn't even... We didn't even contemplate it, didn't even discuss it. And the Rhineland marks a point of no return, and people then also refused to acknowledge that. And Todman writes this, "What seemed in retrospect like "the most clearcut moment "at which Hitler could have been stopped passed "almost without comment. "Hitler was astonished "at the French and British passivity." One of the reasons why Hitler thought, as he went to war in '39, that Britain would not go to war. He thought that Britain would stand aside, the mistake the Germans made in 1914, and arguably the mistake the Germans have made in 2021 with the European Union.

The Germans think they understand the British and they never do. They never do. Churchill recognised the significance of the German invasion of the Rhineland. He wrote a book called "Step by Step." Well, he didn't so much write a book, but he collected together journalistic articles he had written since 1935, and he published it in June '39. In other words, before the war. So there's no opportunity for Churchill to adjust the events, adjust the truth. This is the real thing from that period.

And his opening journalistic article, which is published in this book, 'Step by Step,' "There has really been a crisis "in which hope and peril have presented themselves "so vividly and so simultaneously "upon the world scene. "When Herr Hitler, on Saturday last, "repudiated the treaty "and marched his troops into the Rhineland, "he confronted the League of Nations "with its supreme trial, "and also with its most splendid opportunity. "If the League of Nations survives this ordeal, "there is no reason why the horrible, "dull, remorseless drift of war "in 1937 or 1938, "and the preparatory piling up of enormous armaments "in every country should not be decisively arrested." Churchill wrote that in 1936, at the time of the Wehrmacht's march into the Rhineland. No, this isn't hindsight. But Churchill's a washed up, defeated politician on the Conservative Party backbenches in the House of Commons. No one... Well, a few. Few people in power take him seriously. What the people think is very different. And when I'm talking to you again, I will talk to you about what ordinary people thought about Churchill.

But ordinary people don't have the power in the 1930s to influence events. In April 1936, the following year, Churchill wrote this: "The rapid and tremendous rearmament of Germany, "which are proceeding night and day "and is steadily converting nearly 70 millions "to the most efficient race in Europe "into one gigantic, hungry war machine. "The second is that the recent actions "of Germany have destroyed all confidence "in her respect for treaties, "whether imposed as a result of defeat in war "or freely entered into by post-war Germany "and confirmed by the Nazi regime. "The third is that practically "the whole of the German nations being taught "to regard the incorporation "in the Reich of the Germanic population neighbouring states "as a natural, rightful, and inevitable aim "of German policy. "The fourth is that the financial "and economic pressures in Germany are rising "to such a pitch "that Herr Hitler's government will, "in a comparative short time, "have only to choose between an internal "and an external explosion." In other words, exactly as in the book, "Blood and Iron," this is a militaristic state, and it goes long, long, long way back in history. The state of Prussia. Its Prussia's militarism which dominates the Second and Third Reich, but Prussia itself was formed out of the mediaeval order of Teutonic knights. The whole basis of Prussia is military.

That's why Prussia can no longer be found on a map of Germany, because the Allies insisted on taking the name away. can take the name away, but can you change the outlook? Well, since 1945, the answer is yes, you can. But the story isn't ended, is it? Britain and France are now, by 1936, re-arming fast. Too little, too late? Well, in Britain's case... France is a different issue. France's problem is not equipment material, but its officer corps. Remember that in 1940, the only senior French officer who actually advanced a war to the Germans was De Gaulle, the others simply retreated. And the hero of Verdun, Marshal Petain, this great French hero,

establishes a fascist state at Vichy after the surrender of France. We have to remember that it isn't a fall of France, it's the surrender of France. Here in Britain, we just about did enough. We just about had enough aircraft, we just about had enough superiority at sea. And as war drums beat across Europe by 1936, former British Prime Minister from the First World War, David Lloyd George, visited Hitler in Berchtesgaden. And what did he say?

What did Lloyd George feel when he met Hitler? Was he appalled and come back and say, "This man is a mad man, "he's going to take us to war, "we've got to stop him"? "He's a born leader of men, "a magnetic and dynamic personality "with a single-minded purpose, "has resolute will and a dauntless heart. "He's not merely in name, "but in fact, the national leader. "As to his popularity, "especially among the youth of Germany, "there can be no manner of doubt. "The old trust him, the young idolise him. "It is not the admiration accorded "to a popular leader. "It is the worship of a national hero "who has saved his country "from utter despondency and degradation." "I have never met," said Lloyd George, "the happier people than the Germans, "and Hitler... "Hitler is one of the greatest of men." How foolish can intelligent people be? How stupid? How stupid can they be? As the war comes ever closer, month by month, and year by year, and Churchill is still, like Saint John the Baptist, a voice crying in the wilderness. In March 1938, Germany annexed Austria, the Anschluss. Britain and France stood aside. The opinion of the British government, Chamberlain's government, is, "Well, they're German "and that's fine by us. "Why should we worry about a greater Germany?"

In September 1938, the nadir of appeasement is reached at Munich, where Britain and France allowed Hitler to annex Czechoslovak Sudetenland. When Chamberlain came back, and waved his piece of paper as he came down the aircraft steps, and a film clip which you will almost never see in Britain, and therefore in other parts of the world, was filmed of Chamberlain appearing on the balcony of Buckingham Palace with the king and queen. The first time a prime minister had done that. We're all familiar with the Queen and so on, the royal family, waving to the crowds outside Buckingham Palace. This is the first time that a prime minister... Oh, you'll see pictures of Churchill at the end of the war, of course. But it's one of those things you don't see in Britain, is the film of Chamberlain waving to the crowds with the king and queen after Munich. And if you're Jewish and German, in November of that same year is the horror of Kristallnacht. But of Munich, over in Romania, a Jew called Mihail Sebastian kept a journal from 1935 until his death. He died by accident, he was killed by a motor vehicle in 1944. And he's not a religious Jew. And he explains in his journal that he became more Jewish as a result of increased fascism across Europe. But he wrote in his diary about Munich.

On Saturday, the 1st of October, 1938, he wrote this, "Peace, a kind of peace. "I haven't the heart to rejoice. "The Munich Agreement does not send us to the front, "it lets us live. "But it prepares terrible times ahead. "Only now will we start to see "the kind of pressure that "the Hitlerites exert." We did not stand firm over the Sudetenland. And Sebastian is right. He's absolutely right, we're now headed towards war. By 1939, the war drums are almost deafening. In March, Germany occupies and annexed Bohemia and Moravia in violation of the Munich Agreement. The Czechs don't put up any resistance. They'd lost their defensive line when the

Sudetenland was taken. Germany now establishes the Protectorate of Bohemia & Moravia. The Czechoslovak Republic is dissolved by Hitler. Five days later, on the 20th of March, Von Ribbentrop, the German foreign secretary, delivered a ultimatum to Lithuania, demanding that it cede the Memel region to Germany. A day later, Hitler demands the return of Danzig to Germany, which was a free city. On the 23rd of March, Germany annexed the Memel region. France and Britain do nothing. Until the 31st of March. On the 31st of March, Britain and France offer a guarantee to Poland of Polish independence. On the 3rd of April, two days later, Hitler orders the German military to start planning the operation for the invasion of Poland.

On the 10th of July, Chamberlain reaffirmed support for Poland and makes it clear that Britain did not view Danzig as being an integral part of Germany, and would intervene on behalf of Poland if hostilities broke out with Germany. He didn't declare how. On August, Ribbentrop does a deal with the Russian foreign minister, Molotov, the famous Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. They will not go to war with each other, they will divide Poland between them. They hated each other and war will be inevitable, but for this moment in time, they will be allied in the destruction of Poland and the division of Poland. Poor Poland has been divided more times than a birthday cake, and here it is all over again in August 1939. On the 30th of August, Germany issues an ultimatum to Poland concerning the Polish corridor and the free city of Danzig. On the 1st of September, without waiting for a reply, Germany invades Poland. And the historian, Simon Jenkins, writes, in this way, "The start of the second World War was like "an opening in a game of chess: Predictable. "As with the first war, "Germany sought to escape its geography. "It looked eastwards towards the open lands "beyond the Oder and Danube, "and westwards across the Rhine "into the ever-contested territory "of old Lotharingia. "Hitler was a keen student of history. "Bismarck in the 1860s had carefully covered his back "with an alliance with Russia "to give him room for manoeuvre "against Austria and France. "He'd done so with conspicuous success. "In 1914, Kaiser Wilhelm failed to do likewise "and paid a terrible price "by fighting on two fronts.

"By 1939, Hitler had neutralised Austria, "Czechoslovakia, and Poland, "and had held the Soviet Union in check "with the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. "He knew that he would one day have to reckon "with the Soviet Union, "but for the moment France had "to be removed from the equation. "The strategic clarity was Bismarckian." And that brings us to Sunday, the 3rd of September, 1939, when first, Britain, and then, secondly, France, declare war on Hitler's Germany. And for the second time in a generation, we find ourselves at war. Churchill wrote an epilogue to his book, 'Step by Step,' and he wrote it in June, 1939, a few months before we go to war in September. And in this epilogue, which is quite short, Churchill wrote, "June 1939, here then, "in an hour when all is uncertain "but not uncheered by hope and resolve, "this tale stops. "Great Britain stands in the midst, "and even at the head "of a great and growing company of states "and nations ready to confront "and to endure what may befall. "The shock may be sudden "or the strain may be long drawn, "but who can doubt that all will come right "if we persevere to the end." In less than a year, Churchill is Britain's prime minister.

His appointment is enthusiastically welcomed by ordinary people, even though it was opposed

by the king and queen. And opposed by the majority of the Conservative Party in the House of Commons. In the country, people realised that Churchill was the only man for the hour. But he didn't come to a Britain surrounded by allies. Europe was falling into Nazi clutches. And a month after coming to power, France would surrender despite Churchill's efforts to keep France in the war. And Britain and its empire find itself alone. And is in the words of the American historian, Lynn Olson, in a absolutely fantastic book, she describes Britain at this moment as "Last Hope Island." And so we are. Last Hope Island for democracy in Europe, arguably the world. And we remain on our own until Stalin enters the war in June of 1941, over a year after Churchill takes office, and we have faced the evacuation from Dunkirk and the Battle of Britain. And it's a good 18 months before America comes into the war. But all that is a story for another day. And I shall sleep soundly tonight in the knowledge at Churchill is in Number 10. But as I come back to 2021, I say, if only Churchill was in number 10. Thanks very much for listening.

- Thank you very much, William. You'll address the questions?

Q&A and Comments:

- Yes, I've got some... "General Pershing implored the Allies "to march into Berlin "and confirmed Germany's defeat "and counter the stab in the back." The problem is that the Americans refused to serve under one command. Pershing and the Americans served as a separate command, and not under Marshall Foch in the way that France and Britain were fighting. And so, his voice was less likely to be listened to. In addition, I met a person whose father was a personal friend of Foch, and Foch had told this lady's father that... When asked by her father, "Why did you not advance on Berlin?" The answer was there were too many deaths. They could not take anymore. The Americans had come quite late into the war, and although their proportion of deaths was the same as France and Britain, the numbers were far fewer. So there's a problem in the Allied command. Now, remember that when we get to 1944, there is no such problem because the British are quite clear, and the French don't have a voice in it anyhow. The British are quite clear that Eisenhower must be in overall command. And although De Gaulle defied Eisenhower in sending French troops to liberate Paris for political reasons, so he could declare that France had itself liberated Paris, it wasn't important. Pershing's point was far more important, but it wasn't going to be listened to by Britain and France, and particularly by Marshal Foch, who was the man who was going to make the decision in 1918.

Q: "Do I see a parallel between West German Appea... "German appeasement and Western appeasement of Iran?"

A: Appeasement is a tricky business because of what happened in the 1930s. It led Anthony Eden to disaster at Suez in 1956, feeling that we couldn't appease Nasser, and that was a terrible mistake. You've got to think clearly about appeasement and what it might mean. That's a really difficult question. I can't really answer that quickly. I'm not sure whether it would've been better for Saddam Hussein to have been continued in office, in power, or whether we really did... You have to look at the consequences of that. I think the whole business with Iran is that it

wasn't thought through. We know that the defeat of Iran wasn't thought through, clearly what we did afterwards. We know that information about nuclear weapons and so on was inaccurate. We had all sorts of problems with it. It was not well-handled, I think, is the answer. But I would need much on the...

Oh, sorry, somebody's left a personal message. Would you be kind enough... Because I can't keep it. Would you be kind enough to send it to me on an email and I will reply?

"Dachau" is the answer to the question about the concentration camps. Oh, somebody else answered the question for me, thank you ever so much. If anyone knows the answers to the questions before I reach them, that's terribly helpful. Yes, yeah, you are absolutely right.

Q: "The punitive terms of Versailles are "often blamed for World War II. "Weren't they based on the punitive indemnity payments "that France was required to pay in 1871 "at the end of the Franco-Prussian War?"

A: Absolutely. This problem is the German-French problem, which goes right back to the Battle of Jena in the early 19th century, Napoleon's victory over Prussia. The Prussians... The Prussians absolutely were seething for revenge, which they got 70 years later... Just under 70 years later, in the Franco-Prussian War. They put this enormous burden on France. Clemenceau, at Versailles, said he wanted to reduce Germany to the status of a mediaeval agricultural economy. Woodrow Wilson was absolutely appalled, and Lloyd George was caught between them. Lloyd George really favoured Clemenceau rather than Wilson, until it was pointed out to Lloyd George that he wouldn't win a British election if he took such a stance. And so, Lloyd George came over to Wilson's side, preventing Wilson from walking out altogether and allowing Wilson to push forward the idea of the League of Nations. But it was this idea that... It's this France thing made worse again with World War II, because then Germany actually occupied France, or part of France, and the other parties, Nazi... Or fascists with Vichy. And that is why we land up with the European Union.

The European Union, from a German point of view, was to help the German economy. From the French point of view, it was to keep Germany out of France to keep the balance of power. And it's in... And we now have a situation with only two major powers in the EU, Germany and France. When Britain was in the EU, it gave a third balance. And the other problem about Britain withdrawing is the position of America. It's very interesting how the current British government is hardly going to be top of the pots with Biden's Administration, but it is very noticeable how the Biden administration has been opening lines of communication with Britain and being positive because they do not want... It appears they do not want to rely upon France as contacts in Europe, even if Britain's outside of the EU. It looks as though maybe for NATO reasons only, but maybe for wider political reasons, the Biden Administration seem to be shifting in terms of their looking at Europe. And that would fit all the previous history if America, under Biden, and it looks as though that's true, is not going to retreat into isolationism or indeed into a position of simply looking at the Pacific.

Oh, "Hindenburg knew that my friend, Eva, was Jewish." I don't... I never asked her that, I don't know. I'm not sure. She probably said. Knowing Eva, she probably was very clear.

"I read 'It Can't Happen Here,' "which indicated the Holocaust come in France, "England, Germany, or the US." Yeah, well, that's a very interesting question. People know I'm not Jewish. Antisemitism was rife in... If we take Britain, was rife in the upper classes. And of course, you know about Dreyfus in France.

Q: Yes, it could have happened elsewhere, or could it?

A: It certainly could and did happen in France under Vichy, which was horrible, and nasty, and dreadful as you well know. Yes, it did happen. Would it have happened here? Well, the truth is it happened in the Occupied Channel Islands. The British would like to think that if we'd been invaded, we would not have handed Jews over. We would've done, I'm absolutely certain.

Q: The question is, "would sufficient number of Britons refused?"

A: There is a number of works, fictional works, written, which I agree with the theme: It would all have depended if Churchill lived. If Churchill lived, Britain would've resisted. If Churchill had been killed, then the British would've accepted whoever. Halifax, Mosley, Edward VIII back again, they would've accepted it all. And that's the problem. Yeah, I can't... it's a horrendous thought. We would like to think we'd have been better, but I'm not sure that the Channel Islands suggest that we would. There are examples in the Channel Islands incidentally of Channel Islanders hiding Jewish families, but there's also other examples of handing over Jews.

Oh, yes. Somebody's asked about Palestinian education about Israel. Interestingly, I've just written something on my blog about education. One of the things we've got to be careful about is the... Is teaching what, in Britain, has been called "patriotic education," and what in America was called "nationalist education." If you are American, just think for a moment of that appalling 1776 Commission that Trump asked and set up, and that thankfully Biden tore up and put in the bin as soon as it was... As soon as he took office. It was trying to change history to argue a political point. And you've got to be very, very careful with the way that you teach history in schools. Very, very careful. And the present situation... Well, the situation under Trump was deeply worrying. The situation in Britain has been, over the past few years, increasingly worrying, although we have not... We did not get as far down the line, or haven't got, as Trump's 1776 Commission. If Trump had been reelected, I dread to think what would've happened. He wanted basically a white American history to be taught, but also lots of other things in it.

"Trudy has told us repeatedly "that the high command, " well-educated, cultured, "yet gave into Hitler's policies." That is largely true. If you are interested in how some educated Germans fought against it, read up the story of Adam Von Trott. Adam had been educated at Oxford. Adam was very pro-British, very, very aristocratic, and was in the German foreign ministry. And

he had a conscience with himself of whether he would leave, which he had the opportunity to, and come to Britain and fight against Nazism, or whether he should stay in post in the foreign ministry and do what he could. And he sent a great deal of information to Britain. In the end, he joined the 1944 plot against Hitler and was one of those who was brutally murdered when the plot was discovered and went wrong. There were Germans that stood up, very few. The problem was with the army, and it goes right back to Hindenburg and others, who thought they could control Hitler, who was, after all... "I might say, my dear, "he's awfully working class. "And he isn't really one of us, he's Austrian." And they thought they could control this person and they couldn't. And the military, anyhow, had this chip on their shoulder back to 1918. So the stab in the back argument, which I mentioned, it helped Hitler enormously. I know.

Somebody said "The people who met at "to finalise the final solution have PhDs." Can we just be quite clear, having a PhD does not mean you're moral, having a PhD does not particularly mean you are clever. Having a PhD means you jumped through certain academic hoops. I've now annoyed every academic who's listening this evening, but there may be some that might even agree. Letters after names don't mean anything, common sense means a great deal. And it seems to me the older I get, the less common sense I see amongst those who so-called leaders, whether it's Britain or wherever else. I mean, yeah, it's worrying.

Q: "How did so many million people, "even at the last presidential election, "vote for Trump?" is a question I have to ask.

A: How did so many people believe what they were told about the European Union in Britain? Now, that I... I've now annoyed half the British audience because we are still deeply divided over it. "Did Trump even hint at ? "I think to compare Trump in any way "to Hitler using democracy is diminishing "the evil Hitler and Nazis..." Now, now, we've got to be careful about this. There is a continuum and at one end is fascism of Nazism, horrendous. At the other end is populism, where you've got Trump. The problem is if you go down a particular route of populism, does it turn, and at what point might it turn, with a different leadership, into neo-fascism? This is extremely difficult and dangerous territory. No, you cannot compare Trump to Hitler. That would be stupid. But you can say that the path that Trump was on had distinct fascist overtones, or undertones, and that you, in a democracy, have to stop it because otherwise you'll drift awards it. And Trump might be succeeded by who knows who, who might go down further. And before you know what's happening, you have... And the 1776 Commission is a question in point. However, in Britain and America, in an earlier talk I gave, our democracy is rooted in the same place, and it's not like European democracy. And our 17th century democracy, in one form in the United States and a different form in Britain today, comes from the England of the 17th century. And what is good about it is that this democracy has so far, for both countries, since the 18th century, held firm. And it's likely to hold firm. It held firm in America dealing with Trump, and it will hold firm here in Britain. But it is important that we are aware of the mo...

My first degree's in law from Oxford, and I worry enormously about the attacks on lawyers, both in the States and Britain. We have to defend the independence of the judiciary. And that's of

course questionable with the Supreme Court in America, it's questionable in other ways in Britain.

Our government has broken international law twice in 12 months. This is not good news. We have to make sure that the levers of democracy are working well. And if I say Britain and America, and some of you don't come from Britain and America, remember, if you're Australian or Canadian, your basis of democracy is the same because it's come from the same source, it's come from Britain. And however much you change it about, like the different aspects of federalism in both Canada and America, doesn't really matter because fundamentally it's the same. And we've got to make sure these levers of democracy operate. Now, in the Weimar Republic, it was so... There was no history of using democratic levers to prevent something like Nazism arising in Germany. Whether there are levers in Germany now to top the rise of the AfD, that's an open question, I think.

Q: "Wouldn't you agree that communists "and socialists fighting each other?"

A: Well, yes, you could say that, but if you take a Churchillian view, then the threat to Europe, post-World War I, was, A, communism, and later, fascism. And if you think of Germany, we land up with fascism between 1933 and 1945, and we land up with Marxism in half the country from 1945 to 1989. So it could have gone either way. Authoritarianism a bit... It's like the question, "Is Stalin worse than Hitler?" "Is Hitler worse than Stalin?" There's been a book by Laurence Rees, a very well-known historian in Britain, an excellent historian, just been published called "Hitler and Stalin," which looks at the two men. It's a really good book. Anyone interested in looking at the horror of both, then look at Laurence Rees, R-E-E-S. It's simply called "Hitler and Stalin." I've got it and I've only glanced at it so far, I've not read it. I'm not getting involved in too much about Israel 'cause I'm not Jewish. If you want to ask about that, I think you better ask Trudy 'cause I really don't...

Q: "Were there no thinking, decent Germans?"

A: Yeah, you see, how do you oppose? This is the question. How do you oppose a society like the Nazis were creating? I'm asked this, "Weren't there people opposing it?" So next week... I've just given you a talk in 1933 and I've said, "We must hold on to democracy folks. "We must hold on to Weimar "because for all its faults, "the alternative of socialism and Nazism is "totally destructive of a democratic way of life, "of freedom, and of liberty." And I'm due to give a second lecture next week. And Judy appears on screen and says, "I'm sorry, William will not be giving tonight's talk." And so somebody writes him, "Well, is he ill?" "No, he's disappeared." And that's what happens. And so, one of you is asked, "Who has the same views as me? "Would you stand in and give the talk?" And you hear that not only has William disappeared, but his wife and children have been arrested. Will you give the talk? Well, you may. I'm an adult educator. I've been an adult educator all my professional life. One of the things... And I had a friend of mine who's no longer with us, who was a former principal at the College of Adult Education in Manchester, where in the 1980s, I was principal, and he was part of the denazification

programme in West Germany. And he was a German scholar, he'd been to Germany under Hitler as a student. And he'd been in Hamburg, and he knew about Hamburg.

And he told me that under Hitler, they were ins... All the adult education institutes were instructed, the Volk high schools were instructed, not to employ Jewish tutors, part-time tutors. No principal objected, they all simply did not renew contracts for part-time Jewish teachers. They may have been teaching philosophy, history, German, French, anything. They simply were sacked. Except the principal in Hamburg, which is left wing. And the Hamburg principal refused, and said that "This is not acceptable," and went on employing them. And he disappeared and was never found again. It's very difficult. None of us know. None of us know how we would react in... We all would like to think we would be the ones to stand up, we would suffer the torture, and we would suffer death like Adam Von Trott in 1944. We will do it. But when push comes to shove, would we? would we not find a reason? "I can't do it. "Look at me now, at my age. "I've got an eight year old "and a three-year-old grandson, "and their lives are threatened. "Would I give the lecture "or would I be quiet?" These are impossible questions to answer unless any of us are put in that position. We all would like to think we do the best, but I'm not sure we would.

- [Judi] Thank you, William. I think we're at 06:20, I think we have run out of time. But thank you so much. I mean, I'm happy to stay on if you want to answer a few more, unle--

- Yeah, I... Yes, if people want to. Can I just say, Wendy? a number of people have sent personal messages to me. I'm really happy about it, but I can't keep them if you put them on the screen now. Please just email me, and my email has been sent out by Judi. So just pop an email and I promise I will answer.

- [Judi] Super. Well, it is Judi speaking to now.

- Oh, hello Judi, hi.

- [Judi] Hi. So I'm happy to stay on if you want to take one or two more questions. Should we give it questions and then we'll call it?

- Let me pull some more down, hang on. I'll try... I'll go through a bit and see. There's a short one here. "Would you agree that communists "and socialists fighting each other..." Oh no, we've done that in a different way. No, I need to go down further. Sorry, it's taken me back to the beginning.

Q: "Please elaborate on "the German-British relationship in 2021."

A: That's very difficult because we don't know where we're going. During the Brexit negotiations, the view in Britain was that Germany would knife France in support of Britain because the German car industry needed Britain. In the event, the German government stood shoulder to shoulder with France in insisting on what you might regard as a tough deal for Britain. On the

other hand, Britain's negotiations were absolutely appalling. We had not worked out what we wanted, the whole thing was a nightmare from a British point of view, and Germany ceased to help. What we're concerned about in the future are two things... Well, forget about trade for a moment. We're concerned about the security of Northern Europe. That is to say the Baltic country and the Polish borders with Russia. The German military forces are about as useful as a chocolate teacup. And the only other country with a reliable military presence in Europe is France. That's why America has been so concerned about the lack of resources put in by Europe. Italy has the biggest military resources, but enough said.

So it's France and Britain. So Britain is worried about that. Britain is worried that the EU would establish an EU army, which Britain would not be a part of, and I think so is America. One of the reasons that Biden's Administration, I think, is making nice noises to the British government is over NATO because that's absolutely critical for the Americans as it's critical for us. But the EU might decide to do something stupid, particularly because France, you remember, actually at one point, withdrew from nato. The other problem about Germany is this fear of the right in Germany. The AfD has a large number of seats in the Reichstag. It's the third largest party in Germany. In certain regions, it's the largest. It's really worrying.

And in terms of the EU as a whole, then Germany holds the purse strings, and he who holds the purse strings can really dictate what happens. So Britain, in one sense, is glad to be away from the EU. That's why people voted for Brexit. They didn't like the push towards unification politically, or federation, whatever word, integration in Europe. But on the other hand, people were anxious here about the economic fallout, but I think that will be managed one way or the other. Some of us were deeply worried about the defence fallout, particularly if America was to withdraw into greater isolation from Europe. That would be a major fear for Britain and I thought that would happen under Biden, and it doesn't appear to be. So maybe realpolitik has struck the Democratic Party and all things will be well. But there is concern about Germany, I can't deny that. It would be silly to say there was. Shall I take one more question?

- [Judi] Yes, sure.

Q: Oh yes, "Some people in years to come may say "that Britain should have acted in 2021 "to stop atrocities in Myanmar, "Turkey, or even China."

A: No, Britain is not a major power. Britain, outside of the EU, is probably a second or even third rank, a two-and-a-half ranked power. And if anyone is to act in though... If one single country is to act, it is America. There is no other answer to that. There's no way Britain can police the world and there's no way that Britain should police the world. You could argue that the EU should, but my God, would you want to be in an army trying to sort out anything in China alongside the Portuguese and the Romanians? Well, frankly, no. If anyone is going to do anything, it has to be the Americans. Although, it is interesting, since Biden's become president, Britain has sent... Is sending our largest, and newest, and most effective aircraft carrier to the far east, obviously in support of the Americans, and clearly with American approval, and maybe

American requests. So Britain does have a presence, but its presence has to be a very secondary one. The question is what America will do and how America relates to NATO, to the threat of... I see it as a threat, of an EU army, and how America relates to Britain. There's a lot of important questions to answer and we don't know the answers to those.

- [Judi] Well, thank you so much, William. Thoroughly enjoyed that.

- Oh, I'll do one quick question.

Q: "Why didn't the king and queen support Churchill "as prime minister?"

A: Because they were pro-German, period. Not pro-Nazi, pro-german.

Sorry, I had to get that one in, Judi. I'll finish, I'll stop.

- [Judi] Thank you so much... Thank you so much once again. Thoroughly enjoyed that. And thank you to everybody who joined us. You're making me laugh. And we'll see you next week. Looking forward.

- Oh, that'd be nice. I look forward to meeting many of you next week. And again, if you want to talk to me personally, please email me. I will reply. Cheers, bye bye.

- [Judi] Bye-bye, thank you so much.

- [William] Bye-bye. Bye-bye.