Neville Chamberlain - Peace in our Time Negotiations

From time to time, for whatever reason, national boundaries are redrawn. In 1954, for example, Nikita Khrushchev gave Ukraine the Crimean Peninsula which had been in Russian hands since the time of Catherine the Great. Sixty years later, people living in the Crimea voted to rejoin Russia.

After the first World War, a similar situation happened to Germany. Its boundaries were redrawn following the Treaty of Versailles. About 3 million ethnic-Germans were living in what was then Czechoslovakia. When he came to power, Hitler wanted to annex that part of Czechoslovakia (known as "Sudetenland") to Germany.

Hitler's idea, however, was not to put the issue to a Czech vote. His idea was to take the land, and the people, and simply "annex" them as part of Germany.

When the unrest was happening, Neville Chamberlain was Britain's Prime Minister. He decided to visit Hitler, at the German leader's mountain-top retreat in Bavaria, to talk things over. Perhaps naively, Chamberlain thought he could achieve "peace in our time" with the man from Germany.

We learn more about what transpired from the UK's National Archives:

> *After the First World War, the map of Europe was re-drawn and several new countries were formed. As a result of this, three million Germans found themselves now living in part of Czechoslovakia. When Adolf Hitler came to power, he wanted to unite all Germans into one nation.*
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> *In September 1938 he turned his attention to the three million Germans living in part of Czechoslovakia called the Sudetenland. Sudeten Germans began protests and provoked violence from the Czech police.*
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> *Hitler claimed that 300 Sudeten Germans had been killed. This was not actually the case, but Hitler used it as an excuse to place German troops along the Czech border.*
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> *During this situation, the British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, flew to meet Hitler at his private mountain retreat in Berchtesgaden in an attempt to resolve the crisis.*
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> *...Chamberlain's flight to Berchtesgaden was followed by another to Godesberg a week later and then another to Munich on 29 September. At Munich, Chamberlain got an international agreement that Hitler should have the Sudetenland in exchange for Germany making no further demands for land in Europe.*
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> *Chamberlain said it was "Peace in our time." Hitler said he had "No more territorial demands to make in Europe." On 1 October German troops occupied the Sudetenland: Hitler had got what he wanted without firing a shot.*

Less than a year later, Hitler's troops begin firing many shots in Poland. As it happened, Hitler had never meant what he told Chamberlain.

Shortly thereafter, Britain - an ally of Poland - also was at war with Germany.

This video clip, from a BBC documentary on Neville Chamberlain's policy of appeasement toward Hitler, provides background on the fall of Czechoslovakia in 1938.

Move the video forward, to 7:00, to watch Chamberlain's famous "piece of paper" speech, announcing that Germany and Britain would not fight another war.

Credits:

Clip, from the BBC Worldwide Channel at YouTube.

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