

The History of the Twentieth Century

Episode 316

“Nazism Unleashed”

Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

On September 1, 1939, Adolf Hitler ordered the German invasion of Poland. He did not think France and Britain would go to war over Poland, but was willing to fight even if they did.

Who caused this war? The Great War is often blamed on Germany, although if you look closely, you find plenty of blame to go around. This war, by contrast, offers no room for nuance. This war was caused by an unprovoked German aggression against Poland, full stop. End of story.

And it will allow Hitler and his followers to remove their masks of reasonableness and reveal their true faces.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening War Theme]

Episode 316. Nazism Unleashed.

So here we are: the Second World War.

In some ways, it is useful to think of the Second World War not as a single war, but as a collection of different wars, perhaps five in all, that expanded and overlapped until they became a single global conflict. I would point to the Japanese war against China, begun in 1937 as the first of these wars to start. Maybe we should count the Japanese occupation of Manchuria in 1931 as the beginning of that conflict.

The second would be the Italian campaign for Mediterranean hegemony, which began with the invasion of Albania in April 1939, though arguably you could look to the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. The third would be the moment we're looking at today: when the German invasion of Poland triggered war with France and Britain.

The fourth and fifth wars? Well, we aren't there yet. Be patient.

Still, whatever I may think, history usually draws the line on September 3, 1939, the day the British and French ultimatums expired and those two countries declared war on Germany, as the

official starting date for World War II. This idea is so firmly entrenched I doubt I can do anything about it, so I won't try. Here we are. We are in a world war once again.

When the British government under Prime Minister Herbert Asquith declared war on Germany in 1914, it was taken as read that the declaration applied to the Dominions as well. In 1914, that meant Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Newfoundland, and South Africa.

But the Dominions have become increasingly assertive about making their own foreign policy, beginning in 1919 when they demanded their own representatives at the Paris Peace Conference. The Statute of Westminster, passed in 1931, declared that acts of the British Parliament no longer applied to the Dominions. In 1939, there were still five Dominions, but the list is a bit different. Strike Newfoundland and add Ireland.

To begin with, the Statute of Westminster itself states that it would apply automatically in Canada, Ireland, and South Africa, but would have to be ratified by the parliaments of Australia and New Zealand before coming into effect in those countries. In 1939, eight years later, neither of those parliaments had taken action on the Statute of Westminster, meaning that when Britain declared war on Germany, it dragged Australia and New Zealand along with it. Perhaps "dragged" is the wrong word for me to use here; in both countries the declaration of war was broadly popular, though neither country was prepared for war and neither country felt directly threatened by the war, because Europe was very far away.

In Canada, there were rumblings during the Sudetenland Crisis that if Britain went to war over Czechoslovakia, Canada would not follow. But the events of 1939 persuaded Canadian leaders otherwise. The Canadian parliament was called into session on September 7, and both the Liberal Prime Minister, William Lyon Mackenzie King, and the Conservative Opposition Leader, Robert James Manion, spoke in favor of a declaration of war. Following two days of debate, parliament voted in favor of entering the war, with only one dissenting vote.

The situation in South Africa was more delicate. The Afrikaner nationalists in South Africa had their own version of National Socialism, the Grey Shirts, and other Nazi-curious movements. The government of South Africa was led by J.B.M. Hertzog of the National Party, and he, like many Afrikaner nationalists, opposed South African involvement in the war. But Hertzog and his National Party were in a coalition government with the pro-British South African Party, led by Jan Smuts. There's a name that should be familiar to long-time listeners, from the Great War and from the Paris Peace Conference.

Hertzog submitted a motion to the South African parliament in favor of a policy of neutrality. When the motion was defeated, 67 to 80, Hertzog resigned and Jan Smuts formed a new government, which proceeded to declare war on September 6, even ahead of Canada.

In India, the British-controlled government there declared war on Germany without consulting with any Indian leaders.

And then there was Ireland. The President of Ireland in 1939 was none other than Éamon de Valera, also a familiar name to long-time listeners, as he was involved in the Easter Rising and the War of Independence. De Valera urged the Irish parliament to remain neutral in the conflict, and so it did, although parliament did pass the Emergency Powers Act of 1939 on September 2, which granted the government wartime powers, including press censorship. The government used its censorship powers liberally to ban public commentary favoring intervention in the war on either side, or even the use of the word “war.” The Irish government referred to the events of 1939-1945 as “the Emergency.”

There were those in the IRA who supported Germany, thinking that a British defeat in the war would allow Irish unification. The Irish government used its emergency powers to crack down on any pro-German activity. On the other hand, individual Irish citizens were permitted to volunteer service in the British armed forces, and thousands did. Hundreds of thousands of Irish citizens moved to Britain to work in British factories, which indirectly supported the British war effort.

On September 1, 1939, 54 German Army divisions, organized into two Army Groups, began the attack on Poland. Before I talk about Poland proper, I should say a word about the Free City of Danzig, which, you’ll recall from episode 211, had been established by the Treaty of Versailles as a free port, part of neither Germany nor Poland, despite its overwhelmingly German population, in order to provide Poland with port access to the Baltic Sea. Danzig had its own Nazi Party, and Germans in Danzig enthusiastically embraced the opportunity to return to German rule. On the first of September, the day the war began, Danzig police and SS units fanned out across the city to take Polish officials into custody. Before the day was out, Danzig declared itself part of the German Reich. In Berlin, Adolf Hitler signed a decree confirming this.

As for Poland itself, the nation was in an unenviable strategic situation. The convoluted border between Poland and Germany, drawn at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, had been designed to facilitate Polish self-determination, to include as many ethnic Poles as possible within Poland’s borders without also including too many ethnic Germans, and to insure Poland had a trade outlet to the sea. It had not been designed to be defensible. Poland faced hostile German forces along its northern border with East Prussia, its western border with Germany, and its southern border with Slovakia. Even worse, the Polish Corridor was crucial to Poland, but any military force assigned to defend it would find itself in a two-front war against Germans to the east and Germans to the west. None of Poland’s frontiers offered much in the way of natural defenses.

Nevertheless, French and British military planners estimated Poland could hold off the German invasion for at least two months. The Polish military estimated six months. French advisors suggested the Polish Army fall back from the borders and make their stands along rivers and other defensible positions. Some Polish commanders liked that idea, but the Polish government did not. Western Poland was home to most of Poland’s industry and natural resources and a

substantial fraction of Poland's population. The government in Warsaw feared that if it abandoned these lands too quickly, including the crucial Polish Corridor, the British and French might agree to a cease-fire in place, leaving Poland stripped of its most economically valuable territories while the diplomats talked and talked and talked.

The German plan was simple. Army Group North, commanded by 58-year-old General Fedor von Bock, son of a Prussian aristocratic family, would attack the Polish Corridor from west and east, then drive south toward Warsaw. Army Group South, commanded by 64-year-old General Gerd von Rundstedt, was to strike east and north from Silesia to capture Łódź, Kraków, and ultimately Warsaw.

The Polish military numbered around a million, somewhat less than the German Army and their Slovak allies, but Polish soldiers were not well trained. Poland had just half as many artillery guns and a third as many tanks and aircraft, and what the Poles did have was old and inferior in quality, while Germany's shiny new weapons were fresh from the recent Nazi rearmament program.

Polish military planners anticipated that Germany's armored units would punch through Polish lines, but hoped to be able to surround and isolate these German advances. This hope proved vain. Poland was not yet fully mobilized when Germany attacked, and Polish units, most of which marched on foot, were too slow to keep up with German armor, which literally ran rings around them. When Polish infantry tried to move, they were exposed to German aircraft, which ruled the Polish skies and rained bombs on them like flying artillery guns.

In a matter of days, German units were deep into Polish territory. Kraków, Poland's second-largest city, fell to the Germans on September 6. By the 10th, virtually all of Poland west of the Vistula was in German hands, and German units were in the suburbs of Warsaw.

Few people, even in Germany, expected the Polish to collapse so quickly. Still, the Polish military had a back-up plan in place for when their defenses failed: a general withdrawal to the southeastern corner of the country. Here the broken terrain was some of the most defensible in all Poland. The southeastern corner also bordered on Poland's ally, Romania. The plan was for the Polish military to form a redoubt along the Romanian border and continue the war from there until relief came from France and Britain. On the 10th, the order went out for Polish forces to fall back to the southeast. The Polish government had evacuated Warsaw in the first days of the conflict and set up shop in the small town of Zaleszczyki, along the Romanian border, on the 13th.

As this war was unfolding in Europe, over 7,000 kilometers to the east, Japanese and Soviet Army units were skirmishing in an undeclared war along the border between Manchukuo and Mongolia. On August 31, the day before Germany invaded Poland, a Soviet armored force commanded by General Georgy Konstantinovich Zhukov surrounded and destroyed the Japanese

23rd Infantry Division, forcing the Japanese to agree to a cease fire, which was signed on September 15, to take effect the following day, September 16.

With the war to their east now settled, the Red Army immediately turned its attention west. The very next day, September 17, Soviet troops brushed past the skeletal defenses on Poland's eastern border and advanced into the country. The official reason given in Moscow was that the Red Army was there to protect Poland's Ukrainian and Belarusian minorities, as Poland was clearly no longer able to defend them.

And at this moment, the world got its first inkling that there was more to the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Agreement than a non-aggression agreement. Among those surprised were German military commanders. Some German Army units were already well into the region of Poland designated for the Soviet Union, and now that the Red Army was moving in, Germany's political leaders in Berlin were ordering them to pull out, a command that offended the German military commanders.

On September 28, Warsaw fell and the German and Soviet fronts were meeting up in central Poland. Four weeks into the campaign, there was no hint of French or British aid to Poland, either directly or in the form of opening a second front against Germany. The German Navy controlled the Baltic, but Polish leaders had hoped some Western aid might reach them via Romania. None came. The remaining Polish forces in the southeast crossed into Romania or Hungary, and ultimately to France, as did the Polish government, which brought along Poland's gold reserve. Other Polish land and sea forces escaped via the Baltic Sea to Britain.

Organized resistance in Poland ended on October 6. Some 70,000 Polish soldiers were killed and twice as many wounded. Seven hundred thousand were taken prisoner by the Germans and the Soviets. German losses were a fraction of that: some ten thousand dead and thirty thousand wounded. Among German fatalities was General Wilhelm von Fritsch, killed by a stray bullet during the siege of Warsaw. If that name sounds familiar to you, why yes, this is the very same Wilhelm von Fritsch who had once been Army Commander until 1938, when he was forced to resign after being falsely accused of a relationship with a gay prostitute. I told you that story in episode 304. Hitler ordered a state funeral for Fritsch, but neither Hitler nor any other high-ranking Nazi attended, much to the disapproval of the military command, who were still bitter over how Hitler and his people had treated the general.

[music: J.S. Bach, "Komm, süßer Tod"]

The mood of the German public was subdued during the campaign in Poland, but once the fighting was over, Germans discovered a belated enthusiasm for war, so long as it didn't last too long or cost too much. The fact that neither Britain nor France had lifted a finger to aid Poland led many ordinary Germans to believe that peace was at hand.

Hitler himself was undecided whether to offer the Allies peace or to sic the Wehrmacht on them. He warned his military commanders to “get their heads around” the fact that the war was not yet over. (His words, not mine.) On October 6, Hitler spoke before the Reichstag, warning the rest of Europe that Germany and the USSR alone would decide the future of Poland, but also calling for an international peace conference. What exactly that international peace conference would decide, given that he had preemptively ruled out any discussion over the future of Poland, Hitler left unsaid.

But it helped persuade the German public that the war was practically over. Four days later, on October 10, a rumor swept Berlin that the Chamberlain government had fallen and the British were proposing an armistice. German radio was forced to broadcast a denial. In fact, on October 12, Neville Chamberlain addressed the House of Commons and rejected Hitler’s offer of a peace conference. Soon after, Hitler advised his military commanders to prepare for an attack in the west, as soon as possible. He warned them that France and Britain were getting stronger every day; time was not on Germany’s side.

Meanwhile, there remained the question of what exactly to do with Poland. The earlier German-Soviet agreement left the details on whether there would be a Polish state and what its borders might be to be resolved later.

On September 27, before the fighting had even ended, German and Soviet negotiators hashed out the final details of a partition. Stalin consented to granting Germany control over a larger swath of central Poland in return for Germany agreeing to cede Lithuania into the Soviet sphere of influence. The Soviets would take the territory of eastern Poland granted to them and divide it between the Byelorussian and Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republics, with a sliver in the north, including Vilnius, to be ceded to Lithuania.

There is some evidence that before the war, Hitler contemplated creating some kind of rump Polish state, but if that were ever true, his attitude had changed. Hitler spent most of the month of September in his special command train, touring the front lines and conferring with his commanders. It appears Hitler received reports from the military command but made no effort to dictate the details of how they were to carry out their assignments; this makes a sharp contrast to how he will conduct military affairs in the future, as those of you who have read ahead in the history of the twentieth century already know.

But his time spent in Poland fully confirmed his existing racial beliefs. Hitler professed himself disgusted with what he saw in Poland, describing “cities caked in filth” and the Poles themselves as “more animal than human.”

In October 1939, Hitler set out a series of decrees defining how Germany’s new territories in the east were to be administered. West Prussia, Posen, and Eastern Silesia, territories taken from Germany in 1919, were to be reincorporated into the Reich, along with some additional lands in central Poland. The rest of German-administered Poland, centered on Warsaw and Kraków,

would be organized under the “General Government of Poland,” which was defined as an “ancillary country” of the German Reich, whatever that means.

Hitler appointed the 39-year-old lawyer Hans Frank governor-general of the General Government, answerable only to Hitler himself. Frank was an old-time Nazi; he’d participated in the Beer Hall Putsch in 1923 and later served as a lawyer for the Nazi Party and as Hitler’s personal attorney.

Hitler explained to Frank how he expected the General Government to be administered. It was *not* supposed to be any model of Nazi administration or showcase of economic development. To the contrary, the country was to be kept impoverished. The Polish standard of living would be held to a minimum; the economy would be subsistence agriculture. Or to put it another way, the General Government would be a reservation for Poles. And Jews. The only commodity it would export to the Reich would be its labor.

The Germans began at once recruiting Polish workers, especially young men, to provide cheap labor in Germany, but the numbers of volunteers were disappointing, so the Germans resorted to conscription, sometimes picking up young men off the street or raiding homes at night. By mid-1940, about 300,000 Polish laborers were working in Germany, having been “recruited” in this fashion. Most of them worked as field hands on German farms.

In order to keep the Poles in this degraded state and insure they saw themselves as slaves and the Germans as their masters, they also had to be kept ignorant. Thus, German policy was to shut down high schools and colleges and eliminate educated Poles who might compete with Germans for Polish loyalty and help sustain and perpetuate Polish culture and national identity. Doctors, lawyers, engineers, teachers, academics, scientists, writers, artists, journalists, clergy, aristocracy; they all had to be killed.

Just days after Hitler had become chancellor, back in 1933, he had explained to the military command his vision of the future: lands in the east were to be conquered and “ruthlessly Germanized.” Now Hitler was putting his vision into effect, with the help of the military and the SS. German soldiers were declared exempt from the law while in Poland. By the time fighting was over on October 6, German death squads had already killed more than 10,000 Polish civilians for the crime of being educated and capable. By the end of the year, an additional 30,000 were dead. SS deputy leader Reinhard Heydrich estimated with satisfaction that less than 3% of the pre-war Polish intelligentsia were still alive.

Jewish people in Poland were singled out for special harassment. Unlike in Germany, where Jewish Germans were typically well-assimilated and lived, worked, and dressed like everyone else, Jewish people in Poland often lived apart in separate communities, spoke Yiddish instead of Polish, and dressed differently. Orthodox Jewish men, with their black hats and beards, particularly stood out, and to many young German soldiers, these Jewish men were living embodiments of the stereotypes they had been taught back home. Jewish men were often forced

to bare their heads, to submit to trimming of their beards and side curls, and to perform degrading tasks up to and including setting fire to their own homes and synagogues.

That was in the General Government. What about the situation in Western Poland, the regions that Hitler ordered annexed? This was a strange situation. The 700,000 or so ethnic Germans for whose welfare Hitler had professed such great concern, they lived here, but so did hundreds of thousands of Jewish people and millions of Poles, meaning that the annexation made the German Reich far more multicultural than it had been two months ago. The Nazis had gone to great lengths to pressure Jewish people in Germany to emigrate. Six years' worth of Nazi anti-Semitic policies had reduced Germany's Jewish population by about two-thirds; now, with a stroke of his pen, Adolf Hitler had raised the number back to about where it had been in 1933, not to mention increasing the ethnic Polish share of the Reich's population to something like 10%.

The situation might almost be amusing, but the Nazis found nothing amusing about it and there is certainly nothing amusing about the Nazi response, a response Hitler described to his generals back in 1933: ruthless Germanization. In the Nazi view, a certain fraction of the Polish population was "racially valuable" and could be Germanized. These would be people who spoke German and embraced German culture. It helped if they were also blond. Ideally, they would marry into the German population and disappear as a separate ethnic community.

As for everyone else, they were to be deported to the General Government. Hitler put the SS in charge of this project and created the title "Reich Commissar for the Consolidation of German Nationhood" for SS chief Heinrich Himmler. The emptied lands would be divided into farms of about 200 acres each and distributed to German veterans and other settlers. An enthusiastic Hitler predicted that by 1970, these lands would become so thoroughly Germanified that a visitor would never guess that any other people had ever lived there.

The first mass relocation of Poles took place in December, when the SS transported some 90,000 Poles out of the newly designated Reich lands to make room for German settlers. They were shipped in freight trains to the General Government and deposited there, without any provision for them. They stood around in the winter cold or sat on their bundles of belongings waiting for assistance or direction that never came. One disgruntled German military officer wrote, "There is a system to this. These people are to be made sick, miserable, and helpless. They are supposed to die."

The year 1940 saw another 200,000 Poles deported, distressing even the governor-general, Hans Frank, who complained that his domain was being used as, in his words, "a human rubbish dump." There was no pushback from the Wehrmacht. They were far more offended by the treatment of Wilhelm Fritsch.

Meanwhile, over in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, the new German administration there had been relatively gentle in the months before the war, but that would change. On October 28, 1939, the 21st anniversary of Czechoslovakia's declaration of independence, Czechs

demonstrated against the German occupation, and the Germans responded with violence. One Czech demonstrator was killed, and another, a medical student named Jan Opletal, died of his wounds on November 15. His death triggered another round of protests and this time the Germans cracked down harder. Thousands of students were arrested and sent to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp in Germany; all colleges and universities in Czech lands were closed down.

German policy toward the Czechs resembled their policy toward the Poles: the Nazis presumed about half of all Czechs could be Germanized; the others, including the educated, had to be removed. Still, German policy toward the Czechs was less harsh than in Poland. This is partly because of the Škoda works; Czech arms factories were producing arms and ammunition for the Reich and they needed workers, and also because the Reich Protector, Konstantin von Neurath, formerly the German foreign minister, was not himself a Nazi, but an old-school German aristocrat who ruled with a gentler touch. So gentle in fact that Hitler would lose patience with him and relieve him of his duties in 1941, handing them over to the far less gentle SS deputy commander Reinhard Heydrich.

[music: J.S. Bach, “Komm, süßer Tod”]

Polish military forces on the east side of the line mostly surrendered to the Red Army without resistance. This included some Polish units that had retreated across the partition line to escape the German advance from the west. The Red Army promised surrendering Polish soldiers that they would be processed and promptly released. This was not true. The rank and file were mostly released, but Polish military officers were transported deep into Russia and held in confinement. Temporarily, they were assured. In the meantime, they were given leave to write and receive mail from loved ones back in Poland.

Within the occupied territories, the Red Army presented itself as the liberators of the Ukrainians and Belarusians from Polish oppression. Communists in Polish prisons were released and placed in positions in local government. Rural peasants, mostly Belarusian and Ukrainian, were invited to take revenge on landowners, mostly Polish, and some took up the invitation and attacked or murdered their former landlords.

Everyone in eastern Poland now had to register with the government to receive an internal passport, in compliance with Soviet law. With registration came conscription; about 150,000 young men from the region were drafted into the Red Army. Registration also provided the NKVD, the Soviet secret police, with valuable data. In December 1939, acting on orders from the Politburo, the NKVD began compiling lists of citizens of the region deemed unreliable, including police, veterans, and former officials of the Polish government. On one night in February, 1940, the NKVD rounded them up at gunpoint and loaded them into unheated freight cars in the bitter winter cold for shipment to Kazakhstan and Siberia.

They took not only the unreliable, but their spouses, children, and parents as well. Some 140,000 people were deported. Thousands of them died on the trains en route to their destinations. Thousands more died of the harsh winter conditions after their arrival. Few spoke Russian or had any idea how to provide for themselves and their families in a place like Siberia.

As for the Polish POWs held by the Red Army, in March 1940, NKVD chief Lavrenty Beria submitted a proposal to the Politburo. These Polish military officers, he argued, were a counterrevolution waiting to happen. There was already organized resistance against the Soviet occupation in eastern Poland. These former officers would be just the people who would direct and lead the resistance movement.

Understand that most of the Polish officers in Soviet custody were not career soldiers. Some of them were, to be sure, about a third, but the other two-thirds were reservists who had officers' commissions because they were educated people: teachers, doctors, pharmacists, engineers, professors; the same intelligentsia the Nazis were targeting.

Stalin and the Politburo approved Beria's plan for dealing with them. The NKVD created a program to review the records of each prisoner and make recommendations. After a whirlwind review, 97% of the prisoners were sentenced to death.

The prisoners continued to be told they were to return home. When the first groups left the camps in April, that's what they and their comrades left behind expected would happen. In some cases, they were seen off with honor guards and brass bands. Then they boarded trains which took them to one of five death camps, where they were separated and individually interviewed to insure they were correctly identified; once that was confirmed, they were taken into an execution room one by one and shot in the head.

More than 20,000 were killed and their bodies dumped in mass graves outside of the cities of Kharkiv, Bykivinia, Kalinin, Minsk, and most famously, the Katyn Forest, outside Smolensk, a mass elimination of educated Poles that paralleled what the Nazis were up to on the other side of the partition line.

During their captivity, the prisoners had been permitted to write and receive mail from home. This conveniently provided the NKVD with lists of family members of the condemned prisoners. The NKVD rounded them up, about 60,000 in all. They were told they were being sent to join their husbands and fathers. Instead, they were shipped to Siberia, even as their husbands and fathers were being executed. These deportees would have an even more difficult time, since often they were a mother and children with no father, and thousands of them died.

In June 1940, another wave of deportees was sent from eastern Poland to Siberia. These were the people who refused to register for Soviet internal passports, about 80,000 in all. The main reason for their refusal was that these people were refugees from the German occupation of western Poland, who had crossed the partition line to escape Nazi rule. Most of them were Jewish. They

didn't want Soviet internal passports because they were holding out hope for an Allied victory and an end to the German occupation, which would allow them to return to their homes.

In other words, these people had the distinction of first, having been persecuted by the Nazis, and second, by the Soviets.

Meanwhile, as these events unfolded in Poland and the East, in Western Europe...um...

[sound effect: crickets]

On September 17, the day the Red Army advanced into Poland, the Polish government and military understood the war was lost, as least as far as Polish territory was concerned. Until that date, Poles were looking expectantly to Britain and France to aid them in their struggle. But the hoped-for Allied aid via Romania never came.

Neither did the hoped-for Western offensive. While most of the Wehrmacht was engaged in subduing Poland, the Allies had a substantial numerical advantage along the French-German border. The French Army made a modest advance into the German Saarland in the first weeks of the war. German defenders in the West did not oppose the French advance; they retreated behind the Siegfried Line, also called the Westwall; this was Germany's answer to the Maginot Line, a much more modest series of fortifications behind the border.

The French halted before the Siegfried Line and did not engage the German defenses. On September 21, with Poland collapsing, French forces were ordered to pull back to the Maginot Line. Most people at this early stage of the war anticipated that the Western Front would see more trench warfare, just as had taken place during the First World War, and apparently the French were not eager to begin another round of bloody but indecisive combat, although some French commanders dissented vigorously from this decision, arguing that the French Army was throwing away a golden opportunity.

So, in sharp contrast with the First World War, when the Germans set a huge offensive into motion in the West as soon as war was declared, this time around, the Western Front was eerily silent. This surprising development was soon tagged with a number of humorous names. In Britain, they called it the Bore War, B-O-R-E, like the Boer War, get it? In France, they called it *le drôle de guerre*, the funny war or the strange war. Some called it the Sitzkrieg, a play on the term Blitzkrieg. Winston Churchill would label it the Twilight War.

But its most common name came from the United States, where, on September 18, Idaho Republican Senator William Borah would remark that "there's something phony about this war," which would develop into the label "The Phony War."

The Phony War would last into spring, when it would suddenly end with a dramatic—

Well, that is a story for another episode. We'll have to stop there for today. I thank you for listening, and I'd especially like to thank Phil for his kind donation, and thank you to Steve for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Phil and Steve help cover the costs of making this show, which in turn keeps the podcast available free for everyone, so my thanks to them and to all of you who have pitched in and helped out. If you'd like to become a patron or make a donation, just visit the website, historyofthetwentiethcentury.com and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons.

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And I hope you'll join me next week, here on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as I tell you the story of how in 1939 a totalitarian major power launched a ruthless and unprovoked invasion of a small neutral nation on its border, a nation only born in the aftermath of the Great War. Ah, I hear you say, you already told us that story. Well, next week I'm telling it all over again. The Winter War, next week, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. The Western Front was quiet on land during the Phony War, but there were a few dramatic moments on the sea. On September 17, the same day the USSR invaded Poland, a German U-boat sank the British aircraft carrier *Courageous* off the coast of Ireland. The ship went down in minutes and over 500 of her crew died, including her captain. A month later, another German U-boat sank the British battleship *Royal Oak* in the Royal Navy base at Scapa Flow.

British military planning of the time called for a massive attack on German industry by the Royal Air Force's Bomber Command. But as we've seen before, military thinking of this time tended to regard aerial bombing the way Cold War leaders regarded nuclear warfare; that is, it would likely lead to mass retaliation and devastation on both sides, possibly even the collapse of civilization. So there was a great reluctance in Britain to order air strikes that might provoke German retaliation.

The RAF attempted a bombing run on the German Navy base at Wilhelmshavn, but the British lost some two dozen bombers without sinking a single German ship, so that effort was abandoned.

The British did drop propaganda leaflets over German cities. It was hoped these leaflets would counteract Nazi propaganda as well as making the implicit point that if the RAF could drop pamphlets over major German cities, it could just as easily drop bombs, but the leaflets produced no noticeable effect and provoked another cynical nickname: the Confetti War. RAF bomber

commander Arthur Harris later mocked the pamphlet drops, saying they mostly gave the Germans practice in defending against bombing raids and, as he put it, “apart from that, they supplied a considerable quantity of toilet paper to the Germans.”

[music: Closing War Theme]

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