The History of the Twentieth Century
Episode 319
"Winston Is Back!"
Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

According to Joseph Stalin, he had a conversation in 1931 with Lady Astor, the first woman to be seated in the British Parliament, in which he asked her about various politicians in the UK. Neville Chamberlain? The coming man, she said. What about Winston Churchill? "Oh, he's finished," she assured him.

Stalin replied, "If your country is ever in trouble, he will come back."

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century.*

[music: Opening War Theme]

Episode 319. Winston Is Back!

I invite you to think back for a moment to November of 1938. Neville Chamberlain's diplomacy had led to the Munich Agreement, which was at first hailed as a breakthrough for peace. Then came Kristallnacht, and suddenly making peace with Adolf Hitler didn't seem like such a good idea.

In the House of Commons, Winston Churchill was pressing for his fellow Conservative back-benchers to break with the Chamberlain government and support an amendment, offered by the Liberal Party, which would have created a Ministry of Supply, rather like the Ministry of Munitions that had helped organize the British war effort in 1915, a move aimed at better preparing Britain for war. In Churchill's view, the Munich Agreement had bought Britain time to rearm, albeit time "purchased at hideous cost," as he put it. Neville Chamberlain responded by questioning Churchill's judgment.

Churchill told his fellow back-benchers that this was not a Party question; it was an issue affecting the safety of the nation. He was able to persuade exactly two Tory MPs besides himself to defect. One of them was Harold MacMillan.

The amendment failed. In the weeks that followed, Churchill celebrated his 64th birthday, completed the first volume of his history of the English-speaking peoples, and gave a speech in the Commons criticizing the state of anti-aircraft defenses in London.

On December 9, 1938, still bristling from his defeat in the House, he gave a speech in his constituency, Epping, in the English county of Essex. In that speech, he said:

The Prime Minister said in the House of Commons the other day that where I failed, for all my brilliant gifts, was in the faculty of judging. I will gladly submit my judgment about foreign affairs and national defense during the last five years, in comparison with his own.

In February the Prime Minister said that tension in Europe had greatly relaxed. A few weeks later Nazi Germany seized Austria. I predicted that he would repeat this statement as soon as the shock of the rape of Austria had passed away. He did so in the very same words at the end of July. By the middle of August Germany was mobilizing for these bogus maneuvers which, after bringing us all to the verge of a world war, ended in the complete destruction and absorption of the Republic of Czechoslovakia.

At the Lord Mayor's banquet in November at the Guildhall, he told us that Europe was settling down to a more peaceful state. The words were hardly out of his mouth before the Nazi atrocities on the Jewish population resounded throughout the civilized world.

His words struck a chord. In the next two weeks, Churchill received fifteen speaking invitations. His own constituency Party was less enthusiastic. Party leaders began to muse publicly about the possibility of putting up a candidate more in tune with the thinking of the government at the next general election. But this did not go very far. Churchill was popular in his constituency.

The year changed over to 1939. Prime Minister Chamberlain was still resisting calls for increases in military spending. He was also resisting increasing calls to bring Churchill into the government. He continued to believe that the Munich Agreement was leading Europe in the direction of peace and that either British rearmament or inviting Churchill into the Cabinet would undermine that progress.

In February, Sir Neville Henderson, the British Ambassador to Germany, reported to the Foreign Office a conversation he had had with Hermann Göring. Göring had wondered aloud about the possibility that Neville Chamberlain might be replaced as prime minister by either Winston Churchill or Anthony Eden. It was a matter of great concern to the German government, he had said, that Chamberlain remain prime minister.

In March, Germany occupied the rest of Bohemia and Moravia and declared a German protectorate. Churchill remarked, "It seems to me Hitler will not stop short of the Black Sea…" An official in the Home Office leaked to Churchill information about the weaknesses of British

anti-aircraft defenses. Churchill sent a letter to Chamberlain calling for improvements. Chamberlain wrote back that the matter "is not so simple as it seems."

In April, as you know, Italy annexed Albania. Churchill telephoned Chamberlain and pressed the PM to convene Parliament the next day, which would have been Easter Sunday, and order the Royal Navy to land troops on the Greek island of Corfu as a warning to Mussolini.

Chamberlain declined to do either, but less than two weeks later, he finally agreed to the proposal to create a Ministry of Supply. The name of Winston Churchill was frequently mentioned as the logical person to head this new ministry; recall that Churchill had served as Minister of Munitions for a time during the Great War. But Chamberlain demurred. Privately, he told people of Churchill's call for drastic action following the Italian move into Albania and suggested that were Churchill in the Cabinet, he would wear everyone out with constant calls for what Chamberlain described as "rash suggestions."

Newspaper editorials criticized the decision to pass over Churchill in favor of a less experienced minister for the new post. One newspaper reported receiving some 2,300 letters in support of inviting Churchill into the Cabinet, versus 73 opposed. Most of those opposed cited the failed Gallipoli invasion as their reason.

In May, Churchill was informed that the governments of Poland, Romania, and Greece had decreed that Churchill's fortnightly *Daily Telegraph* newspaper column could no longer be published in their countries; this decision was made to avoid antagonizing Germany. That same month, a British newspaper survey reported that 56% of respondents wanted to see Churchill in the Cabinet; 26% were opposed, and the rest said they were unsure.

In June, Churchill learned from American journalist Walter Lippmann that the U.S. Ambassador to Britain, Joseph Kennedy, was saying privately that if war came, Britain would surrender. Churchill vigorously denied this was accurate, telling Lippmann, "I for one would willingly lay down my life in combat, rather than…surrender to the menaces of these most sinister men."

That same month, a collection of Churchill's newspaper columns was published under the title, *Step by Step.* Labour Party leader Clement Atlee wrote Churchill a letter congratulating him on the publication of the book and remarking, "It must be a melancholy satisfaction to see how right you were."

By July, there were calls coming even from within the Cabinet to grant Churchill a seat at the table. Chamberlain explained his continued opposition by saying he would not "gain sufficiently from Winston's ideas and advice to counterbalance the irritation and disturbance which would necessarily be caused."

That same month, Britain's military attaché in Germany reported to the Foreign Office a conversation he had had with the German finance minister. The minister advised that if the

British government wanted to convince the German government that it was serious about its guarantee of Poland, the best way to communicate that would be to give Churchill a major Cabinet post. The minister told the attaché, “Churchill is the only Englishman Hitler is afraid of.”

At the beginning of August, the government proposed that Parliament adjourn for its usual summer holiday on the fourth, to return to session on October 3. With Hitler ratcheting up tensions against Poland, there were many in Parliament who thought adjourning now was a spectacularly bad idea. Among those making that argument were Labour Party leader Clement Atlee, Liberal Party leader Archibald Sinclair, and a few Tory backbenchers including Harold MacMillan, Anthony Eden, and—you will not be surprised to hear—Winston Churchill. The debate was an angry one. Churchill pointed out that this time of year, just after the harvest came in, was historically the time when wars began, and I’ll just remind you how the beginning of the First World War was postponed until the Austro-Hungarian Empire completed its 1914 harvest.

Chamberlain refused to reconsider, and in fact made the vote on adjournment a vote of confidence, meaning that if Parliament rejected the proposed schedule, the government would resign. So the government got its way.

In mid-August, while Churchill was vacationing in France, the *Times* published a letter signed by 375 British academics, “strongly urging” that Churchill be appointed to a Cabinet post. Churchill spent some of his vacation time painting, and remarked at one point, “This is the last picture we shall paint in peace in a very long time.”

Churchill returned from his vacation on the same day that the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Agreement was announced. Neville Chamberlain recalled Parliament, ordered the Royal Navy to war stations, and completed the formal alliance treaty with Poland.

At 8:30 AM on September 1, Churchill was at his home at Chartwell when the Polish Ambassador to Britain telephoned him with the news that German troops had crossed the Polish border. Chamberlain called for the House of Commons to meet at 6:00 that evening. Churchill’s car took him to London, where he received an invitation from the prime minister to come to Downing Street before the session opened. At their meeting, Chamberlain invited Churchill to join his War Cabinet as a minister without portfolio. Churchill accepted the offer, and they talked for a while about possible military responses to the German invasion.

But when Chamberlain spoke to the House that evening, he did not mention Winston Churchill. He told the House that the government had sent a diplomatic note to Berlin, seeking satisfactory assurances that the German government was prepared to withdraw from Poland. That’ll show ’em!

Churchill stayed overnight in London, expecting to be called into a Cabinet meeting the next day, Saturday September 2. The Cabinet met, but Churchill was not invited. The Cabinet voted to send an ultimatum to Germany, to expire at midnight that night. But no ultimatum was sent.

On Saturday evening, Chamberlain told the House that the government would be proposing a formula under which, if Hitler withdrew his forces from Poland, the British government "would be willing to regard the position as being the same as it was before the German forces crossed the Polish frontier." In other words, if the Germans withdrew from Poland, Britain would pretend the whole thing never happened.

The reaction of the House was, in the words of one Tory MP, "bewildered rage." Another said the House was "aghast." Conservative MP Leo Amery later described his reaction to Chamberlain's speech this way: "For two whole days the wretched Poles had been bombed and massacred, and we were still considering within what timetable Hitler should be invited to tell us whether he felt like relinquishing his prey."

Chamberlain had badly misread the mood of Parliament. Labour Party Leader Clement Atlee was not present that night, so Arthur Greenwood stepped forward and, as per protocol, announced that he would be speaking for the Labour Party. Leo Amery called out, "Speak for England, Arthur!" implying that his own Party Leader had not. Greenwood told the Commons, "I wonder how long we are prepared to vacillate…when Britain, and all Britain stands for, and human civilization, are in peril." His words were received with loud applause.

Winston Churchill said later that he felt the House was more united behind a declaration of war against Germany that night than it had been in 1914, but he said nothing against the PM, because although his invitation to the Cabinet had not been made official and he had not yet participated in any Cabinet meeting, he still considered himself effectively a member of the government.

Five ministers who actually were part of the Chamberlain government met privately after that night's session in the Commons. They were furious that the PM had not followed through on the Cabinet vote for an ultimatum. At midnight that night, they confronted Chamberlain and demanded the ultimatum be sent immediately, or else they would resign. Chamberlain yielded. The ultimatum was sent at 9:00 AM September 3, London time, which was 10:00 AM in Berlin; the deadline was noon in Berlin, giving the Germans just two hours to reply. As you know, no reply came, and Britain was at war.

Parliament met that afternoon; Churchill was handed a note asking him to see the prime minister privately after the House adjourned. At that meeting, Chamberlain offered Churchill the same Cabinet post he had held at the outbreak of the last war: First Lord of the Admiralty, which would include a seat not only in Cabinet, but in the smaller, more select War Cabinet. Churchill accepted the appointment, making him the only member of this War Cabinet who had also been a member of the War Cabinet in the previous war. The new War Cabinet met that afternoon; afterward, Churchill proceeded to the Admiralty, where he met with the Board. The First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Dudley Pound, welcomed him. Churchill told the assembled admirals that it was a privilege and honor to sit in this chair once again, acknowledged there would be many

difficulties, but predicted that together they would overcome them. He adjourned the meeting with the words: “Gentlemen, to your tasks and duties.”

[music: Elgar, *Serenade for String Orchestra*.]

Winston Churchill later claimed, although undocumented, that the Admiralty announced Churchill’s appointment by sending out a signal that read simply, “Winston is back!” Whether or not this story is true, it accurately sums up the mood in the Admiralty. Though he was now 64 years old, Churchill was still energetic. Even lower ranking figures in the Admiralty would receive memos from Churchill requesting progress reports. Satisfactory reports were returned with scribbled notes that read “Very good. Press on,” or similar words. His enthusiasm became infectious.

You may recall from episode 109 that the first time around in this job, Churchill displayed a tendency toward what we today would call micromanagement, sending radio signals to Royal Navy ships all over the world with detailed instructions; never mind that ship captains were more accustomed to broad discretion in the execution of their duties when at sea.

Churchill’s first big idea on how to prosecute the war was the same one he laid out in 1914: Send the Royal Navy into the Baltic to disrupt German shipping, especially those iron ore shipments from Sweden we’ve already discussed, and to bombard the German Baltic coast. In 1914, this idea had been dismissed as too risky. This time around, the German Navy was smaller and weaker than it had been during the last war and would be less able to oppose such a move. German U-boats and surface raiders were attacking British shipping in the Atlantic; a British move into the Baltic might force the Germans to call their naval forces home.

On the other hand, the Germans now had bombers that could attack ships from the air. This was not a factor in 1914, but it was very much one now. A Royal Navy fleet concentrated just off the shore would surely draw every bomber the Germans could put into the air. And they could put a lot of those into the air. Just ask the folks in Warsaw.

Churchill put this idea to the Admiralty on September 12, with instructions to have it ready to go by next spring. But the admirals were able to talk him out of it and it was never attempted. On September 14, Churchill proposed to the Cabinet that the Royal Air Force begin bombing Germany’s synthetic oil plants as a way to cripple the German war effort. The Secretary of State for Air told the Cabinet that the RAF was too small to undertake such an operation and would not be in a position to go toe-to-toe with the Luftwaffe before next year.

The next day, September 15, Churchill traveled to Scapa Flow to survey what had been the Royal Navy’s most important base in the previous war. He learned that the state of its defenses was appalling and there weren’t enough destroyers to properly escort the fleet and protect it from German U-boats. Again he was told it would be spring of 1940 before everything was Bristol fashion.

The German U-boat fleet was put to sea to raid Allied shipping, as in the previous war, but in those early days, Germany didn't have many U-boats. A bigger problem was mines. Naval mines were nothing new, but previously they had to be laid by ships. By 1939, minelaying by air was commonplace, and from the beginning of the war, the British were losing merchant ships to them. Merchant ships could cross the Atlantic undisturbed, only to hit a mine in what was supposed to be a safe harbor in the British Isles, quite contrary to the experience of the last war.

Even worse, the Germans had developed a new way to trigger mines. Previously, mines were triggered by contact with a ship's hull. When the war began, the British quickly discovered the Germans were laying a new type of mine that exploded as soon as a ship came near, but before contact. Because they exploded some distance away, these new mines seldom sank a ship, but they did do enough damage to force the ship to go to the docks for some expensive and time-consuming repairs.

Churchill put a high priority on the Navy capturing one of these mines intact so it could be dismantled and studied. Their chance came in November, when a German mine became beached on a mud flat during low tide on the east coast of England, near the town of Shoeburyness, at the mouth of the Thames Estuary. It must have taken some courage to approach the thing, but technicians did. The British believed the mines used magnetic detection to sense the approach of a ship, so the technicians removed every trace of iron and steel from their clothing and worked on the thing with brass tools. They were successful in disarming it and it was dismantled and studied. This new kind of mine was indeed triggered by magnetic sensors, and studying it gave the Royal Navy guidance on how to defeat the new type of mine.

As for the U-boats, the lesson of the past war was that convoys were the best way to defend against them; that is, civilian ships would travel the seas in groups of 30-100, escorted by Royal Navy destroyers specially armed to combat submarines with depth charges and with ASDIC, which was an early form of sonar developed by the Royal Navy to detect submarines underwater. But Churchill and his admirals opposed setting up a convoy system. The admirals didn't like it because it would use up too many destroyers on convoy duties, and the Navy was short on destroyers as it was. Churchill didn't like the idea for the very Churchillian reason that it wasn't aggressive enough. He and the admirals wanted to organize naval forces not for the defense of convoys, but around the Navy's newfangled aircraft carriers which would then hunt the seas and take the fight to the enemy U-boats.

The shortcomings of this idea quickly became apparent. On September 14, the Royal Navy's newest aircraft carrier, HMS *Ark Royal,* less than a year old, was hunting a U-boat west of the British Isles when it came under attack itself. *Ark Royal* was able to turn itself into the coming torpedoes and they missed. The attacking U-boat was forced to surface by the carrier's destroyer escorts. The crew abandoned the U-boat—*U-39*—and scuttled it, making *U-39* the first German U-boat to be lost in the war.

Three days later, in a similar encounter with a U-boat, the older British carrier HMS *Courageous* was not so lucky. German submarine *U-29* was able to sneak up on the carrier and hit it with a salvo of torpedoes. *Courageous* sank in twenty minutes, taking with it 519 crew members, including the captain, and making it the first Royal Navy vessel of the war to be lost to enemy action. *U-29* was able to evade the carrier's escorts and return to Germany in triumph.

These two experiences proved that the idea of sending carriers and escorts to hunt down U-boats was flawed, and the Navy abandoned it. The inadequacies of the defenses at Scapa Flow was demonstrated in spectacular fashion when a German U-boat, *U-47*, was able to penetrate Scapa Flow. In the early morning darkness of October 14, *U-47* torpedoed and sank the First World War dreadnought HMS *Royal Oak* while it was at anchor. Of her 900 or so crew, 835 died, including a rear admiral and more than a hundred boy sailors, aged 15-17. As a result of these losses, the Royal Navy discontinued the practice of assigning sailors under 18 to active warships.

The British thought at first that *Royal Oak* had been bombed, only later discovering the remains of German torpedoes. Because of this confusion, *U-47* was able to escape undetected and return to Germany, where its crew and its captain, 31-year-old Günther Priem, were hailed as heroes. He was awarded the Knight's Cross by Adolf Hitler personally, and in 1940 published his autobiography.

Back in the days of the Weimar Republic, when Germany was still observing the restrictions of the Treaty of Versailles—well, some of them—the German Navy ordered three heavy cruisers of the *Deutschland* class. Their names were *Deutschland, Admiral Scheer,* and *Admiral Graf Spee.*

You see, under the terms of the treaty, Germany was not allowed to build battleships, so it built these three ships, officially cruisers, but they were as big as they could possibly be without exceeding the limits of the treaty and were armed with the kinds of big guns normally seen on battleships. The German name for this class of ship was *Panzerschiffe,* which means roughly, "armored ships." The British called them "pocket battleships." All three of these ships participated in the non-intervention patrols during the Spanish Civil War.

When war was imminent, the Germans sent two of these three pocket battleships into the Atlantic to raid enemy shipping. *Admiral Scheer* was in the midst of a refit at the time, and would not be available until 1940. *Deutschland* had only modest success, sinking a few Allied ships, but was able to return to Germany, where it was renamed *Lützow*. Adolf Hitler decided that it was a bad idea to name a ship *Deutschland,* that is "Germany," because if the Allies sank it, that would be a particularly hard blow to morale.

And then there was the *Graf Spee. Graf Spee* had been ordered into the South Atlantic before the war broke out. But even after the war broke out, the German government was wary of ordering the ship to attack British commerce, because in those first few weeks there was still hope that the British might rescind their declaration of war and accept the loss of Poland, so the admirals were wary of any action that would encourage the British to fight on.

But as you know, the British fought on anyway, and on September 26, *Graf Spee* was ordered to begin raiding. Remember that this is how cruisers get their name: they were originally conceived as ships that would travel long distances alone and raid enemy shipping. *Graf Spee* had a much more successful campaign than did its sister ship *Deutschland*. Over the next two months, it captured nine civilian ships in the South Atlantic and during a brief foray into the Indian Ocean. The captain of *Graf Spee* operated according to the so-called "cruiser rules." That is, *Graf Spee* would fire warning shots to get the merchant ships to stop, then would board the captured ship and remove the crew, who would be put into lifeboats if they were likely to be rescued; otherwise they would be taken prisoner. Once the ship was evacuated, it would be sunk.

Graf Spee was successful enough that its captain and crew struggled to find places to put all their prisoners. Many were transferred to the *Altmark*, a German supply ship that was accompanying *Graf Spee*. I will have more to say about *Altmark* in a future episode.

The Allies were keen to hunt down and sink or capture *Graf Spee* and devoted a couple of dozen British and French warships to the task, including *Ark Royal* and six other British and French carriers and battleships and sixteen Allied cruisers.

At dawn on December 13, 1939, *Graf Spee* was off the coast of South America when it spotted one of the Allied naval groups that were searching for it. This was a British cruiser squadron of three ships, the heavy cruiser *Exeter* and the light cruisers *Ajax* and *Achilles*. The Germans correctly identified *Exeter*, but at first believed the other two ships to be merely destroyers. The captain of *Graf Spee*, Hans Langsdorff, ordered an attack.

As *Graf Spee* closed, the captain realized his mistake. He was up against a stronger force than he had realized. But *Graf Spee* was diesel powered; the older British ships were steam powered. So he gambled that it would take the British ships time to get up to full steam and chose to continue the attack.

Graf Spee's gunfire was tight and accurate, thanks to its modern targeting systems. The Germans aimed their biggest guns at *Exeter* and inflicted serious damage. *Ajax* and *Achilles* then closed on *Graf Spee* to draw its fire away from the wounded *Exeter. Exeter* was taking on water and most of its guns were out of action, but the one turret that was still operational fired a shot that destroyed *Graf Spee's* fuel processing system. The German ship now had only sixteen hours' worth of fuel, and repair during combat was impossible.

There were no friendly naval bases to flee to; there were no other German ships in a position to come to the rescue. *Graf Spee* had only one option left: to make for the neutral port of Montevideo in Uruguay. The British ships pursued, even the crippled *Exeter*. A shot from *Graf Spee* put *Exeter's* last turret out of action; the ship was now a sitting duck. A few minutes later, *Ajax* took a serious hit. At this point, *Graf Spee* might have been able to finish off all three of the British ships, but its captain didn't realize how desperate the British position had become. He knew only that his own ship was seriously damaged and running low on ammunition, so he

continued to Montevideo. The wounded British ships stayed on patrol in international waters, watching for the moment the German ship left port.

Under the Hague conventions, a warship like *Graf Spee* was entitled to dock in neutral Uruguay, but it could only stay for 24 hours. If it stayed longer, the ship could be interned for the duration of the war. It also seems that the captain made a poor decision in choosing to seek refuge in Uruguay rather than Argentina, on the other side of the estuary. Uruguay had closer relations with Britain and it was likely that if *Graf Spee* were interned there, the Uruguayans would allow British naval intelligence to examine the ship.

In compliance with international law, Captain Langsdorff released the 61 prisoners *Graf Spee* had been holding to the Uruguayans. The fact remained that although *Graf Spee* was in pretty good shape, her fuel system was wrecked and it would take weeks to repair. Also, her desalination plant was damaged and so was her galley, which meant that a voyage back to Germany would not be possible until those were repaired.

Captain Langsdorff contacted the German Admiralty to discuss his options. The Royal Navy had no other forces nearby, but they sent out radio traffic meant to fool the Germans into thinking that substantial reinforcements were on the way. It worked. Convinced that escape was impossible, Langsdorff took *Graf Spee* out into Montevideo harbor and scuttled it to prevent it falling into enemy hands. Two days later, he killed himself.

There were about a hundred sailors killed or wounded on each side in the action. It was a tough battle, but taking the elusive and dangerous *Graf Spee* out of action has to count as a British victory, albeit one gained at considerable cost. The British made the most of the propaganda value, and it also enhanced the reputation of Winston Churchill.

It was as early as September, just a couple of weeks into the war, that Churchill first made known to the War Cabinet the matter of Swedish iron ore shipments to Germany, and shared in particular the Admiralty's frustration that ships carrying this ore could cruise down the coast of Norway from Narvik all the way to Germany inside Norwegian territorial waters, where the Royal Navy could not interfere. Churchill proposed mining Norwegian waters, which would have been a violation of international law, but would also force those ships away from the coast and into international waters, where the Navy could intercept them.

Once the Winter War began, Churchill proposed a more elaborate scheme to deny the Germans Sweden's iron ore by landing British troops at Narvik, in Norway, seizing that port, then moving east into northern Sweden to seize the iron ore mines. This would be done partly to open a line of communication to Finland, which would receive British aid in its defense against the Soviet Union. But although Churchill was sympathetic to the Finns, he did not want to see Britain itself involved in that war. In his judgment, the worst case outcome of the Winter War would be Soviet naval bases on Finnish soil, but those bases would be part of a Soviet defense against Germany. They were in no way a threat to Britain.

In other words, aiding Finland was all well and good, but denying Germany the iron ore was more important. This move represented perhaps the shortest route to an Allied victory in the war against Germany, Churchill told the War Cabinet in late December, as he was requesting approval to put the plan into action. Now that it was winter and Sweden's Baltic port was closed, eighteen trains were running each day to Narvik, carrying loads of ore destined for Germany.

Churchill wanted at least to land troops at Narvik and seize the port by the first week of January 1940, but even the British military wouldn't go along with that. They favored waiting until March, when spring weather would allow a larger operation. But the delay would allow the iron ore to flow for two more months. The War Cabinet would not agree to either plan; ministers expressed concerns over how the violation of Norwegian or Swedish neutrality would be perceived by other European neutrals or by the United States. No decision was taken, except to study the matter further.

Then in February came the news that *Altmark* had been spotted. Remember *Altmark*? The ship that had supplied *Graf Spee* had escaped the battle with the Royal Navy and was making its way back to Germany. Transiting the English Channel would have been suicidal, so *Altmark* had gone the long way, circling around the British Isles to the north and was now making the final leg of its journey home along the Norwegian coast, through Norwegian waters. Aboard *Altmark* were nearly 300 British prisoners—civilian merchant sailors who had been captured by *Graf Spee.*

The tensions between Britain and Norway—and between Germany and Norway—were about to come to a head.

But that is a story for the next episode. We'll have to stop here for today. I thank you for listening, and I'd especially like to thank Daniel and Ed for their kind donations, and thank you to Martin for becoming a patron of the podcast. Donors and patrons like Daniel and Ed and Martin 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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Next week is a bye week for the podcast, but I hope you'll join me in two weeks' time, here on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we look at what happened when Norway found itself at the center of the war. Operation Weserübung, in two weeks' time, here, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. On October 1, 1939, Winston Churchill made his first speech to the British nation over the wireless. In that speech, he compared defeated Poland to a rock, temporarily submerged by the tide, but which would rise again. Speaking of the Royal Navy's hunt against German U-boats, he said the Navy "was now taking the offensive…hunting them day and night. I will not say without mercy, because God forbid we should ever part company with that, but at any rate with zeal, and not altogether without relish." He warned that the war might last three years or more, but assured listeners that Britain would see it through as "defenders of civilization and freedom."

Churchill's radio address earned praise from every quarter, even from some of his harshest critics in the Conservative Party. Over the following months, he would speak over the wireless a few more times. He always warned the public that "dire events" lay ahead, but always ended these warnings with confident assurances regarding the ultimate outcome. He seemed to have a gift for radio, not unlike Franklin Roosevelt.

Neville Chamberlain's own adio speeches suffered in comparison. They came across as dull and defeatist. The PM's own Private Secretary confided to his diary that Churchill "will, I suspect, be Prime Minister before the war is over."

[music: Closing War Theme]