

Part Four: A Reluctant March to War

Narrator: Yes, we build for the future, and the future always catches up with us. Before we're done building, we've developed something new and have to start rebuilding. That's roughly the kind of people we are: boastful, easy-going, sentimental. But underneath, passionately dedicated to the ideal our forefathers passed on to us: the liberty and dignity of man. We've made great material progress, but spiritually we're still in the frontier days. Yet deep down within us there's a great yearning for peace and goodwill toward men. Somehow we feel that if men turn their minds toward the fields of peace as they have toward the fields of transportation, communication, or aviation, wars would soon be as old-fashioned as the horse and buggy days. We hate war. We know that in war it's the common man who does the paying, the suffering, the dying. We bend over backwards to avoid it. But let our freedoms be endangered, and we'll pay and suffer and fight to the last man. That is the America, that is the way of living, for which we fight today. Why? Is that fight necessary? Did we want war?

In 1917, before most of you fighting men were born, our fathers fought the First World War to make the world safe for democracy, for the common man. They fought a good fight and won it. There was to be no more war in their time or their children's time. Faithful to our treaty obligations we destroyed much of our naval tonnage. Our army went on a reducing guide until it became little more than a skeleton. For us, war was to be outlawed. For us, Europe was far away. And as for Asia, well that was really out of this world, where everything looked like it was torn from the *National Geographic*.

Yet in this remote spot in Asia in 1931, while most of you were playing ball in the sandlots, this war started. Without warning Japan invaded Manchuria. Once again, men who were peaceful became the slaves of men who were violent. In Washington, D.C. our Secretary of State made a most vigorous protest: "The American government does not intend to recognize any situation, treaty, or agreement which may be brought about by means of aggression."

But we the people hadn't much time to think about Manchuria. We were wrestling with the worst depression in our history. Some of us were out of jobs, some of us stood in bread lines, some of us suffered homemade aggression, some of us were choked with dust, some of us had no place to go.

Two years later in 1933, while most of you were graduating from high school, we read that a funny little man called Hitler had come into power in Germany. We heard that a thing called the Nazi Party had taken over. "Today we rule Germany, tomorrow the world." What kind of talk was that? It must be only hot air. In 1935, about the time you had your first date, we read that strutting Mussolini had attacked far-off Ethiopia. A disease seemed to be spreading, so Congress assembled to insulate us against the growing friction of war.

Senator Hiram Johnson: We want no war, we'll have no war, saving defense of our own people or our own honor.

Narrator: Toward this end our chosen representatives passed the Neutrality Act. No nation at war could buy manufactured arms or munitions from the United States.

In 1936, when you were running around in jalopies, we were disturbed by news from Spain. In our newsreels we saw German and Italian air forces and armies fighting in Spain and wondered what they were doing there. For the first time we saw great cities squashed flat, civilians bombed and killed.

In November 1936 the American Institute of Public Opinion, known as the Gallup Poll, asked a representative cross-section of American people "If another war develops in Europe should America take part again?" No, 95 percent. We the people had spoken. Nineteen out of 20 of us said "include us out." To further insulate ourselves we added a cash and carry amendment to the Neutrality Act. Not only wouldn't we sell munitions, but we wouldn't sell anything at all, not even a spool of thread, unless warring powers sent their own ships and paid cash on the line.

In 1937, the press services received a flash from Asia. Yes, the Japs were turning Asia into a slaughterhouse, but for us Asia was still far away. In September 1937, the Gallup Poll asked us "In the present fight between Japan and China are your sympathies with either side?" We answered: with China, 43 percent; with Japan, 2 percent; undecided, 55 percent. We hadn't made up our minds about China. Our Neutrality Act barred sales of armaments only to nations at war. The Japanese had not declared war, so we went right on selling scrap iron and aviation gasoline to Japan.

In March 1938, Hitler had not declared war either, but his goose-stepping army suddenly smashed in and occupied all the soil of Austria. Six months later, Hitler and his stooge met the anxious democracies at Munich. Hitler promised peace in our time if Britain and France would give him that part of Czechoslovakia known as the Sudetenland. Britain and France gave him that part of Czechoslovakia hoping to avert war. Now we had his word, peace in our time.

At home we began to hear strange headlines.

Newspaper Man: Extra! Extra! FBI captures German agent. Read all about it! Nazi spy gang captured.

Narrator: We sat in our theaters unbelieving as motion pictures exposed Nazi espionage in America.

Nazi Speaker: As Germans we know that if America is to be free we must destroy the chain that ties the whole misery of American politics together and that chain is the United States Constitution!

Nazi Sympathizers: Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil!

Narrator: Could these things really be? Yes, these subversive acts were happening in real life every day. German-American bunds organized for the purpose of destroying us marched under our very noses.

Nazi Speaker 2: I pledge undivided allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and the republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

Narrator: In our press we read the news from abroad: that Nazis were spending millions, arming Germany to the teeth. We read that the Tokyo Diet was appropriating tremendous sums, converting Japan into one vast munitions plant. We watched these supposedly poor, have-not nations spend huge sums for armament and we wondered why. Arrogantly they told us why: they had declared war on us long before the shooting started.

Italian-accented Speaker [Quoting Mussolini]: We have actually been at war since the day when we lifted the flag of our revolution against the democratic world!

German-accented Speaker [Quoting Hitler]: The Germans are a noble and unique race to whom the Earth was given by the grace of God.

Japanese-accented Speaker [Quoting Lord Hotta]: The world must come to look up to our Emperor as the great ruler of all nations.

Narrator: When the people of these three nations elected to follow their leaders, death incorporated, they organized to smash personal freedom, equality of man, freedom of speech, freedom of religion, organized to smash the very principles which made us the people we are. So in December 1938, when the Gallup Poll asked us "Should the United States increase the strength of its Army, Navy, and Air Force?" we answered: yes, 85 percent. It was time to look to our defense.

Representative Andrew J. May: Gentleman, this is the Military Affairs Committee of the United States House of Representatives meeting for the purpose of considering national defense.

Charles Edison: The Navy is asking for an increase of 25 percent in authorized naval tonnage, in view of the grave international situation.

Narrator: Congress, reflecting the voice of the people, appropriated the largest sum for military use ever voted during peace in American history. We didn't dream that a few years later it would look like peanuts.

On March 14, 1939, Adolph Hitler broke the pledge he made at Munich. He took over all the rest of Czechoslovakia. There would be no more peace in our time. April 7, 1939. As we here in America observed Good Friday:

Newspaper Man: Extra! Mussolini invades Albania. Extra! Paper! Extra! Paper! Italy attacks Albania.

Narrator: The picture was becoming clear. The conquering forces of violence were being set loose in the world. Where would they stop? In a last desperate effort to avert a world war, President Roosevelt, as a neutral, sent messages to Hitler and Mussolini asking their promise to respect the independence of 30 free countries.

Adolph Hitler: [Speaking German]

Narrator: To Adolph Hitler this message was a huge joke as he repeated the names to a jeering Reichstag.

Adolph Hitler: Litauen, Estland, Norwegen, Schweden, Dänemark, Niederlande, Belgien, Großbritannien, Irland, Frankreich, Portugal, Spanien, die Schweiz, Liechtenstein, Luxemburg, Polen [Laughter from crowd], Ungarn, Rumänien, Jugoslawien, Rußland, Bulgarien, Türkei, Irak, Arabien, Syrien, Palästina [Uproarious laughter from crowd], Ägypten, und Iran.

[Cheering and clapping]

Narrator: This was the only answer the President received.

Reichstag Members: Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil!

Narrator: On September 1, 1939 the Nazi Army smashed into Poland. England and France had a treaty with Poland. Would they act now? At home we listened in suspense.

Radio Announcer: Adolph Hitler's all-out attack on Poland makes the long-dreaded European war a certainty. Prime Minister Chamberlain of Great Britain gave the Nazi dictator a zero hour for withdrawing his troops from Poland. That zero hour ends now. At this time we transfer you to London for an important announcement by the British prime minister.

Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain: Up to the very last, it would have been quite possible to have arranged a peaceful and honorable settlement between Germany and Poland, but Hitler would not have it. The situation, in which no word given by Germany's ruler could be trusted and no people or country could deem itself safe, has become intolerable. Now may God bless you all and may he defend the right, for it is evil things that we shall be fighting against, and against them I am certain that the right will prevail.

Radio Announcer: Six hours after Great Britain declared war on Nazi Germany, the Republic of France followed. All France is in a maelstrom of activity. The Maginot Line has already opened fire on the Germans. The sparring has ended. World War II has begun.

Narrator: At home we were asked "What country do you consider responsible for causing this war?" Germany, 82 percent. We Americans had no doubt who started it. Also we began to fear that this war was going to concern us. President Roosevelt called a special session of Congress to reconsider the embargo against selling munitions.

President Franklin Roosevelt: I have asked the Congress to reassemble in extraordinary session, in order that it may consider and act on changes in our neutrality law.

Narrator: The men of Congress wrestled with their beliefs and our futures. They debated and they argued.

Senator Gerald P. Nye: The arms embargo is far too great a security to American peace to permit its surrender without a last-ditch fight.

Senator Elbert D. Thomas: The Embargo Act, as it now stands, is one-sided and works entirely to the advantage of one side. Therefore the Embargo Act should be modified.

Narrator: We the people also debated and argued whether we should sell arms and munitions. When the question was put to us we had an answer. "Should we change the Neutrality Act so we can sell war supplies?" Yes, 57 percent. Shortly after, our representatives changed the Neutrality Act. We lifted the embargo on arms and munitions. Now we would sell if purchasers would pay and take the stuff away in their own ships. American ships were still barred from combat zones.

Meanwhile on the other side of the globe, Japan was busy trying to bomb, shoot, and terrorize the Chinese into submission. We began to realize that if Japan conquered 400 million Chinese, she might become so strong as to run us right out of the Pacific. You will remember that two years earlier in September 1937 when we were asked "In the Present fight between Japan and China are your sympathies with either side?" only 43 percent were with China. Most of us were undecided. In June 1939, when we were asked the same question, 74 percent said we were with China. Now our minds

were made up. When we loaded our scrap iron on Japanese ships, our citizens protested. Let Mr. Acheson, Assistant Secretary of State, tell us the inside of the story.

Dean Acheson: So until the middle of 1940, the restriction of exports to Japan took the form of moral embargos of airplanes and direct munitions. Then Congress passed the Export Control Act and increasing cutoffs of scrap iron, aviation gasoline, and other strategic items followed. Exports were curtailed to the limit which those responsible for our defense were willing to risk. It was a fearful responsibility. On one side was the possibility, in fact the probability, that one day these materials might be used against us. On the other side was the possibility, in fact the probability, that to cut them off would provoke an attack which we were not then prepared to resist. Finally, in the summer of 1941, as it became clear that Japan was turning her back upon every possibility of reconciliation and adjustment and was determined upon her great gamble of conquest, all exports ceased.

Narrator: On April 9, 1940, the leaders of Nazi Germany shifted their war machine into high gear. They overran into Denmark. They smashed into Norway. On May 10, 1940, they blitzed into Holland and Belgium.

Radio Announcer 2: The Nazis are marching ahead at the fastest speed a conquering army has moved in all history. All roads in France are choked with slow-moving masses of refugees. Nazi Stuka dive bombers are strafing and bombing thousands of helpless women and children.

Radio Announcer 3: Mr. Kaltenborn.

H.V. Kaltenborn: Good evening everybody. Tonight it seems clearly apparent that the first great phase of the war in the west has been won by Germany. The army of French and British has made a valiant battle in its effort to retreat to Dunkirk where there is some slight chance that some part of it can be evacuated.

Radio Announcer 4: Adolph Hitler's mechanized forces are racing toward Paris as French resistance collapses.

President Franklin Roosevelt: On this tenth day of June 1940, the hand that held the dagger has struck it into the back of its neighbor.

William L. Shirer: This is William L. Shirer speaking from the forest of Compiègne where Adolph Hitler today is handing his armistice terms to France. It is 3:15 p.m. Adolph Hitler strides slowly toward the middle clearing. I can see his face. It is grave, solemn, yet brimming with revenge. Off to one side is a large statue of Marshall Foch. Hitler does not appear to see it. Now we see the French walking down the avenue, led by General Huntzinger. Hitler and the other German leaders rise as the French enter. General Keitel reads the preamble to the German armistice terms. This whole ceremony is over in a quarter of an hour.

Female Singer:

The last time I saw Paris her heart was warm and gay.
I heard the laughter of her heart in every street café.

The last time I saw Paris, her trees were dressed for spring.

And lovers walked beneath those trees and birds found songs to sing.

I dodged the same old taxicabs that I had dodged for years.
The chorus of their squeaky horns was music to my ears.

The last time I saw Paris, her heart was warm and gay.
No matter how they change her, I'll remember her that way.

Narrator: Conquering armies now stood on the shores of the Atlantic. The danger was suddenly close. Countries conquered by the Nazis had possessions outside of Europe. Some of these possessions are in America. Would the Nazis demand the French naval units at Martinique? Would the Nazis move into the Dutch oil fields at Curacao? Would the Nazis seize the French naval base in Dakar for invasion of South America?

Already in Brazil there were over one million Germans who lived exactly as they did in Germany: 1,200 German schools with Nazi textbooks and Nazi teachers; Nazi newspapers; Hermann Göring glider clubs had been established. Also in Brazil, there were 260,000 Japanese taking orders from Japan. In Ecuador, within easy bombing range of the Panama Canal, German airlines had been established. German pilots were reserve officers of the Luftwaffe. The German transport planes had bomb racks already built-in. In Argentina, German athletic clubs similar to the Hitler Youth movement had been organized exclusively for Germans. Here was a fifth column ready to take over. In Havana, we met with 20 other American republics.

Cordell Hull: There must not be a shadow of a doubt anywhere as to the determination of the American nations not to permit the invasion of their hemisphere by the armed forces of any power or any possible combination of powers.

Narrator: Twenty American nations stood firm. The Americas would not allow any European colony in this hemisphere to be transferred to a non-American power. We said: "Keep-out!" We meant it.