

Remilitarization of the Rhineland (1936)

Abstract

The Treaty of Versailles and the Treaty of Locarno mandated that German troops remain banned from a zone within Germany that included the entire west bank of the Rhine River up to the borders of France, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg, as well as an area extending fifty kilometres to the east of the river. Already in 1930, under international agreement, the victorious allies from World War I, who had been stationed in the Rhineland, withdrew their troops. During a period of rapid remilitarization in Germany, Hitler decided by 1936 that it was time to reclaim this territory that lay within Germany's borders. On March 7 of that year, three Wehrmacht battalions crossed over the Rhine River, greeted by adoring crowds who were eager to see this territory under the control of the Reich. France amassed troops on its border, but when—despite some worries from his generals—Hitler saw the French were not moving, he proceeded with the total reoccupation of this territory. Hitler justified his act as a response to the recent signing of a Franco-Soviet Treaty of Mutual Assistance in 1935, and some foreign politicians accepted this as a defensive measure. Hitler put his reoccupation to a referendum, which the German people supported in extraordinary numbers. This event is seen as a turning point in the geo-political strengthening of Germany as it signaled to the Nazi government that the European powers would tolerate his expansionist policies. The footage from a U.S. news broadcast shows German troops entering the Rhineland.

Source

∅/In the shadow of the great Cologne Cathedral march the German troops as the invasion of the demilitarized zone begins. Men and guns pour in. For the first time in 17 years, the city's streets resound to the goose step.

/Young and old hail them. We'd never have thought this the possible result of Hitler's bold stroke.

/Joy everywhere. How easily the horrors of war are forgotten in the ecstasy of the moment. Koblenz on the Rhine, once occupied by Uncle Sam's troops. Now Nazi sentries stand guard.

Source: UCLA Film and Television Archives. See also: Remilitarization of the Rhineland, USHMM, Holocaust Encyclopedia,
<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/film/remilitarization-of-the-rhineland>

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