

The Occupation of Prague: A Motorcycle Division on the Charles Bridge (March 15, 1939)

Abstract

While Hitler was declaring his peaceful intentions after the Munich Agreement, he was also planning the “liquidation of rump Czechoslovakia.” Here, Hitler’s primary objectives included improving Germany’s strategic and economic position to better prepare for a later attack on Poland and the Soviet Union. On October 21, 1938, he gave the Wehrmacht the first instructions to prepare for an eventual attack on Czechoslovakia. When a conflict of interests between the Czechs and the Slovaks threatened to escalate in the spring of 1939, Hitler used the situation to carry out his plans. On March 14, 1939, under pressure from Hitler, the Slovak leadership declared its national independence and asked for German “protection” against the Czech opposition. At the same time, Hitler threatened to invade Czechoslovakia and bomb Prague if Czech President Emil Hacha opposed his will. Hacha signed a treaty establishing a protectorate and ordered his army not to resist the entry of German troops on March 15, 1939. On the following day, Hitler announced the incorporation of “rump Czechoslovakia” [*Rest-Tschechei*] into the Greater German Reich as the “Reich Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.” Slovakia gained nominal independence as a German satellite state. Although France and Great Britain (who had assumed responsibility for protecting Czechoslovakia under the Munich Agreement) did not intervene, their attitude toward the German Reich changed dramatically. Chamberlain officially announced the end of his “appeasement policy,” since Hitler’s goal was obviously not to revise the Versailles Treaty but rather to achieve hegemonic supremacy. On March 29, 1939, Chamberlain guaranteed British aid to Poland in the event of a German attack.

The photograph shows a German motorcycle division on the famous Charles Bridge in the heart of Prague’s historic city center.

Source



Source: German troops enter Prague on March 15, 1939. Photo: Herbert Hoffmann. bpk-Bildagentur, image number 30025371. For rights inquiries, please contact Art Resource at requests@artres.com (North America) or bpk-Bildagentur at kontakt@bpk-bildagentur.de (for all other countries).

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Recommended Citation: The Occupation of Prague: A Motorcycle Division on the Charles Bridge (March 15, 1939), published in: German History in Documents and Images, <<https://germanhistorydocs.org/en/nazi-germany-1933-1945/ghdi:image-1996>> [July 13, 2025].