

The German 'unification' of Austria

1. Who is Kurt Schuschnigg?
2. How did he resist Nazi sympathizers in his own country who were trying to take over the Austrian government?
3. Who is Adolf Hitler?
4. How did Hitler take over Austria without firing a shot?
5. What happened to Austria when it became part of Germany?

Austria was Germany's neighbor, and in most of these two countries people shared a common language: German. As the Nazis rose to power in Germany under Adolf Hitler, the German government desired to be unified with Austria as one country, with one government. Part of Hitler's dream was to create a 'Fatherland' or Reich, of all German peoples throughout Europe.

Nazis in Austria **conspired** to seize power in the Austrian government and unite their nation with Germany. For several years in the 1930s they unleashed acts of terror and murder on their own politicians. Austrian Chancellor Kurt von Schuschnigg fought back. He jailed Nazis and **banned** the Austrian Nazi Party. Over time, as Germany's military powers grew, Austrian Nazi's continued their acts of terror. Many sympathizers in Austria still wanted a unification with Germany. As did Hitler.

Schuschnigg met with Hitler, who bullied the chancellor by threatening war with Austria. To make Hitler happy Schuschnigg named several top Austrian Nazis to his cabinet. He was also forced by Hitler to release all Nazi prisoners and lift the ban on the Nazi party.

By 1938, the pressure was too great for the Austrian Chancellor. Schuschnigg decided to put unification with Germany to a **plebiscite**, or direct vote of the people. But before the plebiscite could take place, Schuschnigg gave in to pressure from Hitler and resigned on March 11. Under **coercion** from the Nazis, he pleaded with Austrian military forces not to fight back, as they would be destroyed by the German army. Schuschnigg was immediately thrown into prison.

The next day, March 12, Hitler accompanied German troops into Austria where enthusiastic crowds met them. Many Austrians welcomed Hitler, who they believed would help their **bankrupt** nation in the worldwide depression. Hitler appointed a new Nazi government, and on March 13 the unification was proclaimed.

Germany quickly tightened its grip on Austria. Freedom of the press and the right to speak out against the government were **abolished**. Jews were imprisoned, lost their jobs and personal property. Thousands of Jews would eventually flee Austria.

With hours of the unification of Austria, Hitler and his Nazi government turned their attention to **annexing** the Sudetenland, a region inside neighboring Czechoslovakia. This region was home to thousands of **ethnic** Germans whom Hitler wanted to unify with Germany under Nazi rule.

Dozens of radio news reports about the unification of Austria and the threatened annexation of Czechoslovakia soon reached America, like the one you are about to hear from March 1938.