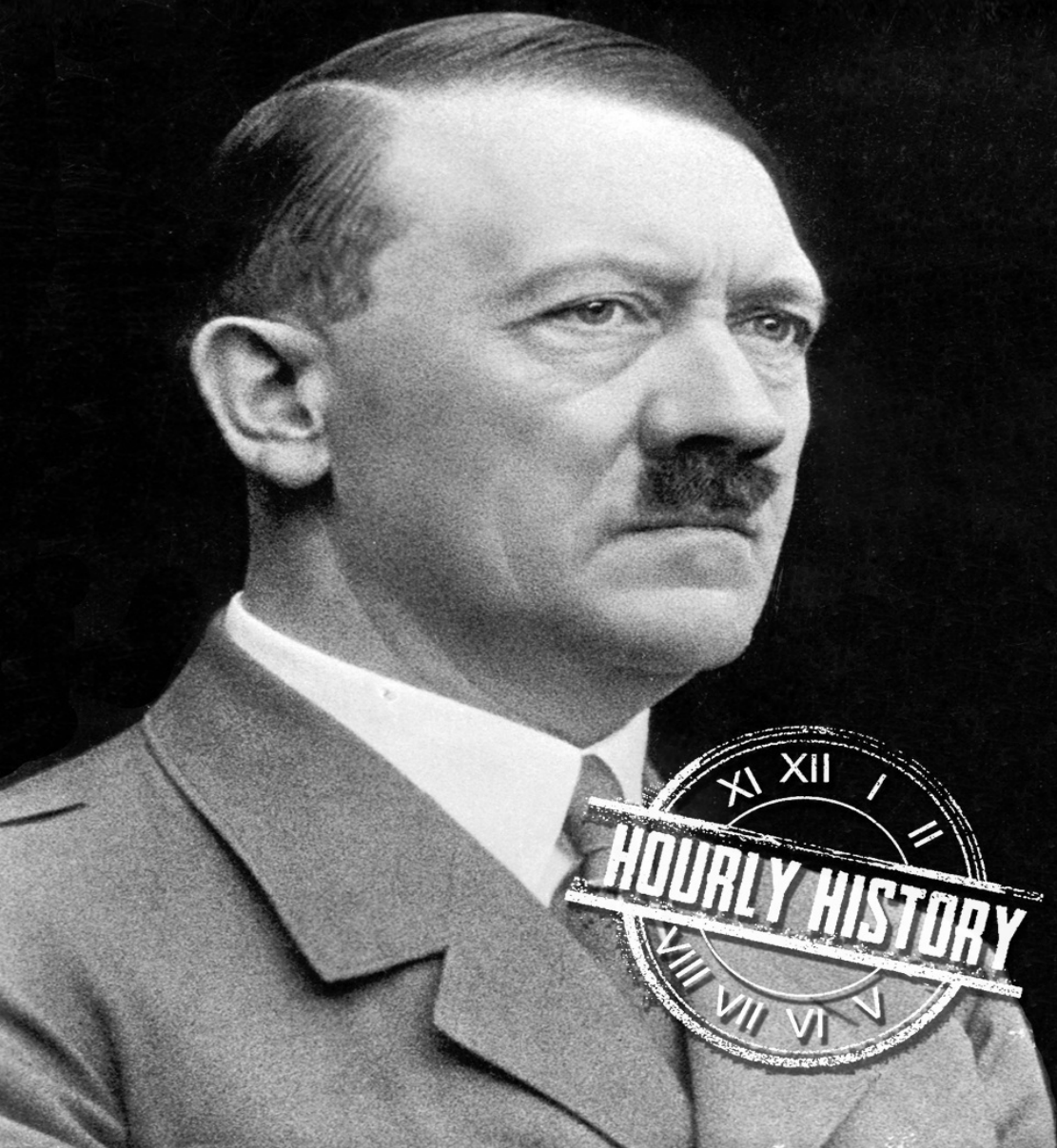


— ADOLF —
HITLER

A LIFE FROM BEGINNING TO END



ADOLF HITLER

A Life From Beginning to End

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Introduction

Adolf Hitler - he is arguably the most notorious person in the history of the world. There are few people alive who don't know something about him and the horrors he perpetrated on millions during the Second World War. Fewer people, however, likely know the story of his life beyond the role he played in the war. Just who was the man behind the monster?

Adolf Hitler was born in Braunau am Inn, a town in what is now Austria, on April 20, 1889. His father was Alois Hitler, Sr. and his mother was Klara Pölzl. He had 5 full siblings, three of whom died in infancy, and two half-siblings. During his childhood, Hitler's family frequently moved, first to Passau, Germany when Hitler was 3 years old, then back to Austria when he was 5, and at 6, the family moved to Hafeld near Lambach after Alois retired. The family then moved into Lambach after Alois' efforts to farm bees failed. Hitler was 8 years old at the time, and he was active in the church there. He sang in the choir and considered becoming a priest. Only a year later, however, the family returned to Austria and settled permanently in Linz, the capital of Upper Austria. When Hitler was 11 years old, his 6-year-old brother, Edmund, died from measles. This greatly affected Hitler, who was formerly an outgoing, confident, and conscientious young man; after Edmund's death, he became a morose, detached child who fought with his father and teachers regularly.

After Hitler's father died suddenly in 1903, his performance in school deteriorated even further, and his mother allowed him to leave. He then enrolled in a secondary school, or Realschule, in Steyr. There his performance and behavior improved, but in 1905, Hitler left the school without plans for more education or a career. After the death of his mother in 1907, he then went to live a Bohemian lifestyle in Vienna, working as a casual laborer, and on occasion, as a painter. He even sought a formal education in art, applying twice to the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, but he was rejected on both occasions. Because he had never finished secondary school, he lacked the academic credentials to pursue architecture, another interest of his and one which the director of the art school in Vienna suggested he should pursue. He subsequently ran out of money and was forced to live in homeless shelters and men's hostels. In the winter of 1909, he received help from an aunt and began to work as a painter. He painted watercolor scenes of Vienna and made enough to live on until he left the city.

Early on in his life, Hitler, like many Austrian Germans, had developed strong German nationalist ideas. He had expressed his loyalty only to Germany, used the German greeting *Heil*, and sang the German national anthem, *Deutschlandlied*, instead of the Austrian Imperial anthem. His ideals may have been further shaped by the political climate in Vienna when he lived there. At the time, spurred on by fears of being overrun by immigrants, Vienna mayor Karl Lueger spouted virulent anti-Semitic rhetoric to great political effect. Additionally, the district in which Hitler lived was steeped in German nationalism, and the local

newspapers promoted prejudice and fanned Christian fears of the area being swamped with an influx of eastern Jews. Still, despite the anti-Semitic attitudes of Vienna at that time, there is strong evidence that Hitler had Jewish friends in his hostel as well as in Vienna in general. While he would later state in his book, *Mein Kampf*, that he first became an anti-Semite in Vienna, most historians now agree that Hitler's murderous anti-Semitism didn't develop until after Germany's defeat in World War I.

In 1913, Hitler received the final part of his father's estate, and he then moved to Munich after failing a physical exam required to enter service into the Austro-Hungarian Army. He would later claim that he hadn't wished to serve because of the mixture of races in the armed forces there. Hitler was living in Munich when World War I broke out. He volunteered for the Bavarian Army, and although historians now believe he served in the army by error, he reportedly served with honor and was praised by his commanders for his bravery. He was, however, bitterly disappointed by the collapse of the war effort and Germany's capitulation in 1918. He believed that the German army had been "stabbed in the back" by civilian leaders and Marxists, who were later described as the "November criminals".

Following the war, Hitler returned to Munich, where he remained in the army. He served as an intelligence agent, and his assignment was to infiltrate and monitor the German Workers' Party, the DAP. He became enthralled with founder Anton Drexler's ideas, which were nationalist, anti-Semitic, anti-

capitalist, and anti-Marxist, and he became increasingly involved with the party, finally joining in 1919. He was discharged from the army in 1920, and he began working full-time for the DAP, which had, by that time, become known as the National Socialist Germany Workers Party or NSDAP. The shortened version of the name was the Nazi Party. Hitler had designed their banner, which consisted of a swastika in a white circle with a red background. Hitler's involvement with the group grew, and he began to play a more prominent role. Despite the conflict, his hypnotic effect on audiences propelled him to the leadership of the party. During this period, he was heavily influenced by the Aufbau Vereinigung, a group of white Russian exiles who introduced Hitler to the idea of a Jewish conspiracy.

On November 8, 1923, Hitler and the NSDAP attempted a coup known as the Beer Hall Putsch. The revolutionaries initially succeeded in occupying the police headquarters and the local army unit, the Reichswehr, but key supporters withdrew from the effort, and neither the police nor the army joined forces with the group. The police were successful in dispersing the revolutionaries the following day. Hitler was arrested for his role in the coup on November 11, 1923. His trial began the following year, and after a verdict of guilty, he was sentenced to five years in prison. He served his time at the Landsberg Prison, where he received friendly treatment from the guards and was allowed frequent visitors as well as mail from supporters. He was pardoned by the Bavarian Supreme Court on December 20, 1924, after having served just nine months of his sentence.

It was in prison where Hitler dictated the majority of the first volume of *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle). The book was originally titled, *Four and a Half Years of Struggle against Lies, Stupidity, and Cowardice*.

Upon his release, Hitler began the task of rebuilding the NSDAP. Though he had been banned from public speaking, he was eventually able to get the NSDAP officially recognized as a political party in Germany. He took advantage of the dire consequences in Germany as a result of the US stock market crash on October 24, 1929. He and the NSDAP promised to strengthen the economy and provide jobs. The Great Depression that followed the stock market crash would provide Hitler with political opportunities he may not have had otherwise. With moderate political parties in Germany increasingly unable to control extremist elements, the NSDAP was able to rise from obscurity to win 107 parliamentary seats in the 1930 election. Though he played a prominent role in reviving the group, Hitler himself, was unable to hold public office; although he had renounced his Austrian citizenship, he had not yet become a German citizen. In 1932, he was appointed as administrator for the state's delegation to a legislative body in Berlin by the interior minister of Brunswick, Dietrich Klagges. This act made Hitler a citizen of Brunswick, and consequently, a citizen of Germany. After this, Hitler was able to gain support from many quarters and eventually gained full power over Germany in March of 1933.

After assuming power, Hitler proceeded systematically to remove any and all opposition to his rule. He assumed the role

of Commander-in-Chief in 1938, which gave him full control of Germany's armed forces. It was then that he began to prepare for war, a war which he saw as a struggle between Judeo-Bolshevism and German National Socialism. He was prepared to do whatever it took to win. On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland, and the war began. It would last until 1945, and it would end in the deaths of millions, including Hitler, himself. With the atrocities he committed, he secured his legacy as the most brutal dictator history has ever seen, prompting one historian to write, "Never in history has such ruination – physical and moral – been associated with the name of one man".

Chapter One

Hitler's Early Years

“Society wants to believe it can identify evil people, or bad or harmful people, but it's not practical. There are no stereotypes.”

—Ted Bundy

Adolf Hitler was born on April 20, 1889, at 6:30 in the evening on Easter Sunday, to Alois Hitler and Klara Pözl, Alois' third wife. His father, Alois, was a mid-level customs official who was the illegitimate child of Maria Anna Shickelgruber. He took the name Hitler in 1876, as it was the name of the man his mother had married five years after he was born, Johann Georg Hiedler (or Hitler). There is evidence that this man may have been his biological father, though neither parent claimed that as the fact after they were married. Another possibility for his biological father was his step-uncle, Johann's brother, Johann Nepomuk. Some scholars argue Nepomuk couldn't admit paternity because of his marriage to another woman. Nepomuk took Alois in when he was in need and left him a considerable sum of money after his death, actions which spurred the speculation regarding paternity. Some have also speculated that Alois' biological father may have been Jewish, although there is

no credible evidence to support this claim, and Johann Georg Heidler remains the most plausible choice as Alois' father. Alois was a conceited man and had a terrible temper. He often took his problems out on his wife and children. Klara, his wife, was just the opposite, but she had no power in the household, and of course, at the time, women had virtually no power outside of the household either. Thus, despite her more agreeable nature, she was not able to stop her husband from mistreating the children whenever he was in a bad mood.

Hitler was one of six children that Alois and Klara had, but only Hitler and one other full sibling survived past childhood. Hitler also had a half-sister and a half-brother who were born to Alois and his second wife, Franziska Matzelsberger. Both of these children, Alois, Jr., and Angela, were raised by Alois and Klara. Hitler's full brother, Gustav, died at 2 years old in 1887. His full sister, Ida, died at the same age as Gustav a year later in 1888. Another full brother, Otto, died before he was a year old in 1887, and his other full brother, Edmund, died at the age of six in 1900. Edmund's death from measles had a particularly devastating effect on Hitler, as his other siblings had died before he was born. After Edmund's death, Hitler became much more detached and took on a darker, brooding attitude, where before he was a confident, outgoing young man.

Paula was the only one of Hitler's full siblings to survive childhood. She died in 1960. She characterized her childhood relationship with her now infamous brother as one of "constant bickering and strong affection." While there is evidence she shared her brother's strong German nationalist beliefs, she

never joined the Nazi Party, and after the war, she refused to comment any further on her political beliefs except to say that she knew nothing of the Holocaust perpetrated by her brother. She worked as a secretary in a military hospital for much of World War II. At the end of the war, she was debriefed by American forces but was later released from custody, after which she returned to Vienna. In 1952, she returned to Germany and continued to live under the pseudonym Wolff. She had lived under this name during the war at her brother's request, and during which time, she received financial support from him until his suicide in 1945. Hitler apparently thought little of her intelligence as he often referred to her and his half-sister Angela as "stupid geese." Paula only gave one post-war interview, which was broadcast as part of a program called *Tyranny: The Years of Adolf Hitler*. In the interview, she refused to answer political questions and spoke mainly about Hitler's childhood. Paula died in June of 1960 at the age of 64.

Hitler's half-sister, Angela, was reportedly very close to her brother, though she too denied any knowledge of the Holocaust following the war. Angela was the only one of Hitler's siblings that he mentioned in *Mein Kampf*. She was married twice in her life and widowed both times. Her first husband died in 1910 and her second husband committed suicide after World War II. During the war, she acted as a liaison between Hitler and the rest of the family, with whom he desired no contact. She died of a stroke in 1949. Prior to her death, she continued to speak highly of her infamous brother and claimed she also knew nothing of the Holocaust. Hitler's half-brother, Alois Jr., left

home at 14 years old after a violent argument with his father. He later met and married an Irish woman, and settled down in Liverpool, England. After several failed attempts to start a business there, he left his family and returned to Germany in 1914. During World War I, he became stranded in Germany and subsequently married another woman. After the war, a third party told his first wife, Bridget, that he was dead.

Hitler himself was a sickly child whose mother fretted over him constantly. His father, Alois, had little interest in helping raise his children. He left most of that to his wife, preferring instead to pass his time at the local tavern or attend to his hobby, which was keeping bees. Various accounts note that Alois made long visits to the tavern and almost continuously yelled at his children. Even a close friend stated that he was rough with his wife and rarely spoke to her at home. It was not uncommon that he would pick on the older children or his wife in front of the rest of his family. The result was that he alienated his children, as evidenced by the fact that he became estranged from his older son, and his relationship with Adolf was so strained that the young Hitler was reportedly repulsed by anything Alois suggested. Alois tried to browbeat Adolf into submission, but his efforts were ineffective.

Adolf and his father fought bitterly over young Hitler's future. Alois wanted his son to pursue a career in the Habsburg civil service, but Hitler scoffed at the thought of a life spent enforcing what he considered petty rules and instead wanted a career in the visual arts. The tension between them increased after Alois enrolled Adolf in a Realschule, a secondary school,

which had a curriculum that focused more on science and technology. Up until that time, Hitler had received stellar marks in school, but at this school, he ended up having to repeat a semester, and his grades were never again good. For the remainder of his days there, his grades bounced back and forth between poor and average. After his father's sudden death from a lung hemorrhage in 1903, Adolf convinced his mother to allow him to leave the Realschule in which his father had enrolled him and join another in Steyr. There his performance improved, but his grades were never again at the level they had been earlier in his life, and when he left formal education in 1905, he never returned.

Hitler's religious beliefs have been the focus of some debate. His father, though nominally Catholic, was anticlerical and skeptical of religion; his mother, with whom he was particularly close, was a practicing, devout Catholic. Hitler was confirmed in the Catholic Church in May of 1904. He regularly attended services throughout his childhood and even sang in the choir at the Benedictine Monastery when the family lived in Lambach. It is also said he dreamed of becoming a priest at that time. Some historians, however, dispute even his childhood piety, instead believing that he began to reject religion early on after being heavily influenced by Pan-Germanism, the ideology of which emphasized political unity and downplayed religion.

Questions of childhood piety aside, by the time Hitler left home, a childhood friend noted he never again attended mass or received the sacraments. Some scholars argue that though he continued to espouse a belief in Christianity throughout his life,

he did so mainly for political reasons. They cite as evidence the fact that when he rose to power, he allowed persecution of the Catholic Church and promoted what was called Positive Christianity, a movement which rejected several traditional Christian doctrines, including the Apostles' Creed, as well as several Jewish elements of Christianity including the Old Testament. Hitler is also said to have made many anti-Christian remarks to his confidants, at least one of whom, Goebbels, later described him as hating Christianity. His biographer, Alan Bullock, also wrote that he did not believe in God, but rather was a rationalist who objected to Christianity on the basis that it rebelled against the Darwinian concept of survival of the fittest. Bullock added that Hitler only espoused divine providence in order to defend his own myth.

Hitler's mother, Klara, died in 1907 from breast cancer. Both Adolf and Paula were at her side when she died. Hitler had been very close to his mother and was devastated by her death. Her doctor, Eduard Bloch, later recalled that he had never seen so much pain and suffering in one young man (Wistrich 1997). By the time she died, Hitler had suffered several losses in his life, and some historians believe these losses affected his belief system and shaped his ideological development. It certainly wouldn't be the first time that personal loss caused individuals to question their religious faith and even their worldview. After his mother's death, Hitler left for Vienna, where he hoped to pursue his dream of becoming a painter.

Chapter Two

Hitler's Years in Vienna

“As a kid, I quite fancied the romantic, Bohemian idea of being an artist. I expect I thought I could escape from the difficulties of maths and spelling. Maybe I thought I would avoid the judgement of the establishment.”

—Peter Wright

After the death of his mother from breast cancer in 1907, Adolf Hitler left for Vienna in February of 1908. He dreamed of becoming a painter and moved there with his friend August Kubizek, who wanted to study music. Hitler was 18 years old at the time, and he wanted to study at the Academy of Fine Arts at Schillerplatz. He and Kubizek shared a room at Stumpergasse 29, which was located near the Westbahnhof train station and within easy walking distance of the academy. While there, they enjoyed the surrounding area and culture, strolling along the Ringstrasse, a three-mile-long boulevard lined with a mix of classical and modern architecture. Hitler admired the Hofburg Palace and the Neoclassical parliament building, which later became the subject of one of his paintings. The two friends also attended the Court Opera where they indulged their shared passion for Wagner.

Kubizek was accepted into the music school at the academy, but unbeknownst to him, Hitler was rejected both times that he applied to the art school. Kubizek returned to their shared room one day to find Hitler gone without explanation. He would not see him again until 1938 when Hitler returned to Vienna after Germany annexed Austria. Hitler left their shared room because he had exhausted his financial assets, which had consisted of a small pension following his mother's death and a partial inheritance following his father's death. He had also spent the money he had received from family loans.

After leaving the residence he shared with Kubizek, he lived in a series of low-income lodgings and homeless shelters, and he ate in soup kitchens. He earned money by selling watercolors of Vienna, many buyers of which were Jewish. A fellow shelter resident, Reinhold Hanisch, became his agent, and together, they created a business which flourished for a while until Hitler took Hanisch to court in 1910 for withholding payments for the painting of the parliament building which the two had sold. As a result of Hitler's complaint, Hanisch was sentenced to seven days in prison. The two never worked together again after that, but Hanisch attempted to profit from their short business venture together after Hitler became a significant political figure by selling watercolors he claimed were painted by the German leader. He was arrested for doing so on several occasions, the last of which occurred in 1936, well after Hitler had gained power. He died of a heart attack while in custody in February of 1937. When the police searched his lodgings, several fake Hitler paintings were found.

By some accounts, following his falling out with Hanisch, Hitler turned to several Jewish friends and former clients to help him find more clients and continue selling his paintings. It is also worth noting that many of Hitler's clients were Jewish, and in fact, the NSDAP found unsold pieces of Hitler's work in two Jewish stores in 1938. There are also other sources which report that Hitler was on friendly terms with several Jews when he was in Vienna. The city at that time, however, was steeped in anti-Semitic rhetoric, and despite evidence to the contrary, Hitler claimed in *Mein Kampf* that it was in Vienna where he developed his anti-Semitic ideology. Historical records, however, can only demonstrate evidence of his beliefs after World War I. It is clear that Hitler was exposed in Vienna to antisemitism. The mayor of Vienna at that time, Karl Lueger, frequently spouted an anti-Semitic ideology in his speeches and many of the Viennese newspapers at the time followed suit. Hitler had long been a proponent of German nationalism, and while in Vienna, closely followed the racist nationalism espoused by the Upper Austrian Pan-German politician Georg von Schönerer. Hitler was influenced more by Schönerer's ideology, but he favored the tactics of Lueger.

Hitler continued living in Vienna until 1913. He managed to make a living selling paintings after he and his business partner, Hanisch, parted ways. In 1913, he returned to Munich to avoid serving in the military, but he was found by authorities and returned to Austria for conscription into the armed forces. He was rejected for service in the Austrian armed forces, however, after failing a physical exam. The exam stated that he was "too

weak” to serve in the military. After this, Hitler returned to Munich where he would later volunteer to serve as an Austrian in the Bavarian Army during World War I.

Chapter Three

Life After Vienna – Hitler’s Early Military Career

“Those who want to live, let them fight, and those who do not want to fight in this world of eternal struggle do not deserve to live.”

—Adolf Hitler

After Hitler returned to Munich from Vienna in 1913, he lived on the last installment of his inheritance from his father and by continuing to sell watercolors. Scholars now think that the fact that he was allowed to continue living in Munich, rather than being deported back to Austria after failing his physical exam to serve in the military there, was likely the result of an error on the part of the German government, which simply never raised the question of his citizenship even when he volunteered for the service in the Bavarian Army. In August of 1914, Austria-Hungary and the German Empire entered World War I. Because he was not a German citizen, he requested and received permission from Austria-Hungary to serve in the Bavarian Army. Hitler entered the Bavarian Army as an infantryman in the 1st Company of the 16th Bavarian Reserve

Regiment.

By all accounts, Hitler served honorably in the Bavarian Army. Hitler's unit, the 1st Company, fought in the Battle of Ypres in October of 1914. The battle is remembered in Germany as the Massacre of the Innocents after approximately 40,000 men from nine infantry divisions were killed over the course of 20 days. There were 3,600 men in Hitler's regiment when it entered the battle, but only 611 at battle's end. By December of that same year, Hitler's own company was reduced from 250 men to only 42. After this battle, Hitler was promoted from a Private to a Lance Corporal. He was assigned to be a regimental message runner at this time. This was considered a relatively safe position since the regimental headquarters were often several miles behind the front lines, though there was no distinction between regimental runners and battalion runners, the latter of which moved among the trenches and were often under fire.

Hitler made good use of his time as a regimental runner. For him, the regimental headquarters became a classroom. He had access to, and was allowed to read, incoming orders, directives, and outgoing orders. He took advantage of the relative safety of the position to study military history and theory, and since he had access to numerous officers, he was able to discuss his ideas with them. He also learned about the weaponry that Germany and its allies possessed. He studied their capabilities in detail, learning information such as muzzle velocities and artillery tube and machine gun ranges, as well as

the carrying capacity and horsepower of the trucks and automobiles. He also studied some of the weaponry possessed by Germany's enemies in the war. He was able to study British tanks after they were involved in attacks on Hitler's regiment, then known as the List Regiment in honor of its former commander who was killed in battle.

Hitler also made a number of friends in the war. He had a close circle of friends at the regiment headquarters, many of whom would tease him for his aversion to sexually explicit stories and with whom he would trade his tobacco rations for their jam rations. Additionally, he adopted a stray dog in 1915 which he named Focke, meaning little fox. He referred to the dog as a "proper circus dog" and taught it many tricks. The dog became a beloved companion, and Hitler was said to be heartbroken when the dog was stolen, along with his sketches and paintings, in August of 1917.

Hitler's regiment fought in many battles including the Battle of the Somme, the Battle of Arras, the Battle of Passchendaele, and the Battle of Fromelles, as well as the First Battle of Ypres. At the Battle of Fromelles, his regiment was successful in repelling the Australians, who were mounting their first attack in France. The regiment hailed the defense they mounted as brilliant and called it the "personification of the German Army on the Western Front". Hitler, for his part, reportedly refused a promotion after this battle.

Hitler was decorated for his bravery on two occasions during the war. He received the Iron Cross, Second Class, in 1914 and the Iron Cross, First Class, in 1918. The Iron Cross,

Second Class, was a relatively common decoration, but the Iron Cross, First Class, was rarely given to a Lance Corporal. Ironically, he was recommended for the First Class Iron Cross by a Jewish List adjutant, Hugo Gutmann. He received it after an attack in which messengers and the role they played were indispensable. On that day, the regiment lost 60 soldiers, and another 211 were wounded. Hitler himself was also wounded in the Battle of Somme in October of 1916. He was injured in his left thigh after a shell exploded at the entrance to the dispatch runners' dugout. He begged not to be evacuated, and after he was, he wrote his commanding officer, Hauptmann Fritz Wiedermann, asking to be recalled. Wiedermann arranged for him to return to his regiment in 1917. He was wounded again in October of 1918 after a British mustard gas attack. He was temporarily blinded, and according to at least one source, he also lost his voice. He was hospitalized, and while there, he learned of Germany's defeat in the war. He reportedly suffered a second bout of blindness from the shock of receiving the news.

Hitler was outraged by the Treaty of Versailles in which Germany had to admit it started the war and was stripped of various territories. It also had to demilitarize the Rhineland; damaging economic sanctions were imposed as well. Hitler wrote that, while he was in the hospital bed, he had the idea that he would liberate Germany and make it great once again. He stated he knew his idea would be realized, but he did not commit to a career in politics at that time. In July of 1919, after returning to Munich, Hitler remained in the army as an

intelligence agent. He was assigned the task of influencing other soldiers and infiltrating the German Workers' Party, the DAP. It was this association that would provide the platform for his political career.

Chapter Four

The Formation of the Nazi Party

“Power is not a means, it is an end. One does not establish a dictatorship in order to safeguard a revolution; one makes the revolution in order to establish the dictatorship.”

—George Orwell

After World War I, when Hitler returned to Munich, he became an intelligence officer. His assignment was to influence other soldiers and infiltrate the German Workers' Party, the DAP. He was particularly influenced by the DAP's leader, Anton Drexler. Drexler, born in Munich, was a machine fitter, railway toolmaker, and locksmith. He joined the Fatherland Party during World War I, and in March of 1918, he founded the Free Workers' Committee for a Good Peace. Later in 1918, journalist and Thule Society member Karl Harrer convinced Drexler along with several others to form the Political Workers' Circle. The group met periodically to discuss themes of nationalism and anti-Semitism. Drexler, Harrer, Gottfried Feder, and Dietrich Eckart decided to found the Germany Workers' Party, or DAP, in January of 1919. As a völkisch agitator,

Drexler often espoused anti-Semitic ideas as part of his argument for the unity of the German people. In September of 1919, Hitler attended a meeting of the DAP where Gottfried Feder was the speaker. After the meeting, Hitler got into an argument with Professor Baumann, another attendee, who attacked the soundness of Feder's argument against capitalism and proposed that Bavaria should form a new Southern German nation with Austria after breaking away from Prussia. Drexler was impressed by Hitler's oratory skills as he vehemently attacked Baumann's argument, and approached him afterward to give him a pamphlet entitled *My Political Awakening*. Hitler later stated it represented ideals in which he already believed. Drexler invited Hitler to join the DAP, and on September 12, 1919, he became the group's 55th member.

While he was still an intelligence officer, Hitler began to become more involved with the DAP and took steps to make the party more public. He organized their biggest meeting to that date of some 2,000 people on February 24, 1920, in Munich. At this speech, Hitler laid out the 25 points of the German Workers' Party manifesto, which had a clear foreign policy consisting of the abrogation of the Treaty of Versailles, a Greater German solution unifying all German-speaking people under one state, and the exclusion of Jews from citizenship. The party was also renamed on this day to the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* or NSDAP, the shorter version of which was the Nazi Party. Karl Harrer, who was one of the original founders of the DAP, disagreed so

strongly with this decision that he resigned from the party. In March of 1920, Hitler was discharged from the army and began working full-time for the Nazi Party.

In June of 1921, after a mutiny broke out within the NSDAP when members of the executive committee wanted to join forces with the party's rival, the German Socialist Party, Hitler resigned from the Nazi Party. The committee members quickly realized that without him, the party would cease to exist. He agreed to return on the condition that he replace Drexler as the party chairman and that the party headquarters remain in Munich. The committee agreed, and Hitler became the undisputed leader of the party. Drexler stayed on in a figurehead position as honorary president but left the party in 1923.

Under his rule, Hitler expanded the party membership. At the same time, the political and economic situation in Germany was becoming increasingly unstable. During World War I, Germany had suspended the gold standard when the war broke out. The German Emperor, Wilhelm II, and the parliament made the decision at that time to fund the war entirely by borrowing. The logic was that the government would be able to pay off the debt by annexing resource-rich industrial territory and imposing reparations on the defeated Allies. When Germany lost the war, the strategy backfired.

The Weimar Republic, which was established after the war, was now saddled with a massive debt and began printing money without any economic resources to back it up. The value of the German mark against the US dollar had already fallen from 4.2 to 7.9 marks per dollar during the war, but the Treaty

of Versailles accelerated the decline of the mark against the dollar, and by 1919, the rate was 48 marks to one dollar. It further declined to approximately 90 marks per dollar by 1921. It had stabilized at that rate for the first half of 1921, but in June, the first payment of war reparations, as laid out in the London Ultimatum, came due. The payment was for two billion gold marks annually plus 26% of the value of Germany's exports. When this bill came due, it accelerated the devaluation of the mark, which fell to 330 marks per US dollar by November of that year. In accordance with the agreement, the reparations had to be paid in hard currency and not with the rapidly depreciating paper mark. In order to comply, Germany began mass printing bank notes to pay for foreign currency, which was then used to pay reparations. This resulted in the hyperinflation of the paper mark. By December of 1922, the rate of exchange was 7,400 marks to one US dollar, and the cost of living index had gone from 41 to 685, a 15-fold increase.

By the fall of 1922, Germany could no longer afford to make the reparations payments, and the mark was practically worthless. It was decided that the reparations would then be paid in goods, such as coal, and toward that end, in January of 1923, French and Belgian troops occupied the Ruhr. Workers in the Ruhr subsequently went on strike; the government responded by printing even more money to pay them for their passive resistance. By November of 1923, the value of the mark against the US dollar was 4,210,500,000,000 to 1. In this environment of economic catastrophe, political destabilization and violence followed. On September 26, 1923, the Bavarian

Prime Minister Eugen von Knilling declared a state of emergency and appointed Gustav von Kahr as state commissioner, giving him the power to govern the state. Kahr took control and formed a ruling triumvirate with state police chief Colonel Hans Ritter von Seisser and Reichswehr General Otto von Lossow. On the following day, Hitler announced he would hold 14 mass meetings of the Nazi Party.

After Hitler had announced the mass meetings, Kahr banned them for fear of disruptions. The Nazis then felt they needed to march on Berlin and seize power. Hitler tried to gain the support of Kahr and his triumvirate; however, they had their own plans that didn't involve him. Hitler decided to take matters into his own hands. On November 8, 1923, he and his associates marched on the Bürgerbräukeller, a beer hall where Kahr was making a speech in front of 3,000 people. Beer halls at that time were common meeting locations in Germany. Hitler and some 600 SA, a paramilitary wing of the Nazi Party, surrounded the beer hall and set up a machine gun in the auditorium. Hitler and his forces took control of the hall, taking Kahr, Seisser, and Lossow into a room at gunpoint where they demanded they support the coup, or putsch. Kahr refused, stating that he could not possibly collaborate since he had been taken from the auditorium under heavy guard. Irritated by this, Hitler went back into the auditorium and gave a speech explaining the action they had taken to the audience. One supporter of Kahr, Dr. Karl Alexander von Mueller, a professor of modern history and political science, reported that the attitude of the crowd was changed with just a few sentences,

which he described as almost magical. By the end of his speech, the beer hall erupted in a roar of support for Hitler.

On the following morning, some 2,000 men followed Hitler out of the beer hall. The group, however, had no specific plan, and on the spur of the moment, they decided to head to the Bavarian Defense Ministry. There, they encountered police resistance, and the two groups exchanged fire. Four state police officers and 16 Nazis were killed. The revolutionaries were scattered, and Hitler was wounded. Two days later, he was arrested and charged with treason. The attempted coup became known as the Beer Hall Putsch, and Hitler's subsequent trial and imprisonment would provide him with a national platform to present his ideas.

Chapter Five

Hitler's Imprisonment and Subsequent Rise to Power

“By the skillful and sustained use of propaganda, one can make a people see even heaven as hell or an extremely wretched life as paradise.”

—Adolf Hitler

Despite what many people thought, Hitler's trial for treason was not the end of his political career. It was, in fact, just the platform he needed to gain national attention, and he took full advantage of the situation. He didn't deny the charges; rather, he embraced them, readily admitting that he had wanted to overthrow the government and outlining his reasons for the attempted coup. He took sole responsibility for the putsch, and claimed that there was no such thing as treason against the “traitors of 1918,” those politicians who had ended World War I - in his opinion prematurely - and stabbed the German army in the back. Therefore, he reasoned, he could not be considered a criminal. The newspapers quoted Hitler at length during the trial, thereby giving the German people a chance to get to know him and the way he thought. Given the depth of the economic,

political, and cultural depression the country faced, many people liked what he had to say.

The trial lasted 24 days, over which time Hitler grew more daring in his comments. He began to realize the national impact his was having, and by the end of the trial, he felt confident in giving the following closing statement:

"The man who is born to be a dictator is not compelled. He wills it. He is not driven forward, but drives himself. There is nothing immodest about this. Is it immodest for a worker to drive himself toward heavy labor? Is it presumptuous of a man with the high forehead of a thinker to ponder through the nights till he gives the world an invention? The man who feels called upon to govern a people has no right to say, 'If you want me or summon me, I will cooperate.' No! It is his duty to step forward. The army which we have now formed is growing day to day. I nourish the proud hope that one day the hour will come when these rough companies will grow to battalions, the battalions to regiments, the regiments to divisions, that the old cockade will be taken from the mud, that the old flags will wave again, that there will be a reconciliation at the last great divine judgment which we are prepared to face. For it is not you, gentlemen, who pass judgment on us. That judgment is spoken by the eternal court of history...Pronounce us guilty a thousand times over: the goddess of the eternal court of history will smile and tear to pieces the State Prosecutor's submissions and the court's verdict; for she acquits us".

The three judges who presided over the trial had become so sympathetic to Hitler's cause that they had difficulty

convicting him, but convict him they did. However, while he could have received life in prison for the attempted coup, he was instead sentenced to just five years with the possibility of parole after only six months. Following his conviction, he was taken to the old fortress at Landsberg where he was given a spacious cell, allowed visitors whenever he wanted, received gifts, and had his own personal secretary, Rudolf Hess. He proceeded to dictate to Hess the first volume of his book, *Mein Kampf*, in which he outlined his political and racial ideas in detail. The book served as a blueprint for his future actions.

In his book, Hitler divided humans into three categories based on physical appearance. He declared the Aryan race as biologically and culturally superior to other races. He described Aryans as fair-skinned, blond, and blue-eyed. Jews and the Slavic people of Poland, Russia, and what is now the Czech Republic formed the most racially inferior group. He stated unequivocally that there was no equality of races, and that the Nazi Party was obliged to promote the better and stronger of the races while at the same time demanding the subordination of the inferior and weaker races. He also claimed this was in accordance with the eternal dominating force in the universe. Furthermore, he outlined his belief that Jewish people had conducted an international conspiracy to control world finances and the press, to promote prostitution, and to invent both liberal democracy and Marxism. He, therefore, concluded that the Jewish people were preventing the Aryan nation from taking its rightful place as rulers of the world and that the struggle for world domination was between Aryans and Jews. Throughout

his book, he called Jewish people parasites, liars, and a series of other insulting descriptions.

With the enemy well-established in his book, he then goes on to outline a strategy for conquering most of Europe and taking forcefully those territories to which he argued the Aryans, by virtue of their superiority, are entitled. He stated that all lands to the east of Germany, namely Russia, would be acquired by force and used to cultivate food as well provide room for the expansion of the Aryan race. The Slavic people inhabiting these lands were to be removed, eliminated, or enslaved. Before Germany could attempt this, however, Hitler asserted that it must first defeat France in order to avenge the German defeat in World War I and secure the western border. In the second volume of *Mein Kampf*, which was published in 1926 well after his release from prison, Hitler wrote more directly about the blame he placed on the Jewish conspirators, and his tone was more menacing toward the Jewish people. The book itself consisted of long, rambling sentences, and was even described by Benito Mussolini as a boring tome with little more than commonplace clichés. It, therefore, initially didn't sell well, but after Hitler had gained power, it became commonplace to give the book as gifts to newlyweds, high school graduates, and upon other celebratory occasions. At that time, millions of copies were sold.

In December of 1924, after only serving nine months of a five-year sentence, Hitler was released from prison. While incarcerated, he had gained insight into the reasons for the failed coup. He now realized it had been premature and was

determined not to make the same mistake again. He set about the task of re-establishing the Nazi Party, which had been banned and fallen into disarray as a result. In 1925, Hitler visited the Prime Minister of Bavaria and convinced him to lift the ban on the party after promising that he and the other members would work within the rules of Germany's democratic constitution. At the first big meeting of the newly re-established party, however, Hitler got carried away in his speech to some 4,000 Nazi members and began to make some of the same threats against the democratic republic. Because of this, the Bavarian government banned him from public speaking for two years. It was a major setback for the gifted speaker who was able to virtually mesmerize an audience, but rather than being discouraged, he set about reorganizing the party.

Hitler organized the Nazi Party into two divisions, one of which was dedicated to finding ways to undermine and eventually overthrow the German democratic republic. The other division was assigned the task of creating a government in waiting that would be immediately able to replace the democratic republic at the moment it was overthrown. This second division, the PO II, created its own departments that included Agriculture, Economy, Interior, Foreign Affairs, Propaganda, Justice, and Race and Culture. The party then proceeded to divide Germany into 34 districts, each with a leader. The party also founded Hitler Youth, an organization modeled after the Boy Scouts program in the United States that targeted boys aged 15 to 18. There was also an organization developed for younger boys and ones for girls and women as

well. The paramilitary wing of the party, the SA, helped keep meetings from being disrupted, and realizing the German people's fondness for uniforms, adopted outfits of brown shirts with boots, swastika armbands, badges, and a cap. A highly disciplined unit of the SA also became Hitler's personal bodyguard unit which answered directly and solely to him. This unit was called the Schutzstaffel or SS for short, and the members of this elite guard wore a black uniform modeled after the Italian Fascists.

Despite Hitler's considerable effort, the Nazi Party faced a new challenge which initially limited its success. The economy was improving in Germany after an American named Charles G. Dawes drew up a plan reducing the war reparations. His plan was approved by the Allies; it stabilized the mark and provided for huge loans to help the German industry rebuild. Germany also had a new president, Paul von Hindenburg, who had been a famous Field Marshal during World War I. Backed by the conservative and moderate political parties, he was bringing stability to the republic and was active in thwarting any attempt on the part of radical parties to capture the presidency. Despite the change in fortune for Germany, Hitler knew the good times would not last, and he also knew that when that time came, the German people would look to him once again.

During the mid-1920s, Hitler wanted to make the German people more aware of his goals. He wrote a second book toward this effort, but it was not discovered and released until after his death. It was called *Zweites Buch*. In it, he outlined more specifically his foreign policy. At the same time, the SA

began to try deliberately to antagonize the Rotfront, a paramilitary unit of the German Communist Party. They marched into their strongholds and initiated violent altercations. These altercations grew increasingly violent over time. The Nazi Party also worked through political means to change the government. In 1929, a league of right-wing organizations, including the Nazi Party, put forth a referendum known as the German Referendum, which sought to introduce a law that would prevent the enslavement of the German people, renounce the Treaty of Versailles, and make it illegal for German officials to cooperate in the payment of reparations. It was approved by 94.5% of those who voted for it, but because of low turnout for the vote, it failed to pass.

In the midst of these changes within Germany, the global economy faced a significant new challenge with the crash of the US stock market on October 24, 1929, and the Great Depression that followed. The crash had a global impact and by the early 1930s, millions of people were out of work in Germany. This further weakened German confidence in their government and many people found Hitler to be a refreshing change. Hitler was a gifted speaker, powerful and spellbinding, and he attracted a large following of Germans who were, by that time, desperate for change. He promised them a better life and that Germany would once again be a great country. The Nazi Party had great appeal among the lower middle class and the poor, the support of whom boosted the party to prominence. By the 1932 elections, the Nazi Party won 33% of the votes, which was more than any other party, but still

represented a decline from the elections of the previous July. Hitler then agreed to a coalition with conservatives and negotiated an agreement with President von Hindenburg whereby he would appoint Hitler as chancellor, but the government would retain the appearance of conservative dominance. In 1933, Adolf Hitler was appointed chancellor, head of the German government. He would then begin to take the country in a new direction, one that would ultimately result in the Second World War.

Chapter Six

World War II

“I do not see why man should not be just as cruel as nature.”

—Adolf Hitler

After the US stock market crashed in 1929 and the Great Depression began, the German people became less and less satisfied with their government. The new German chancellor, Heinrich Brüning of the Centre Party, initiated austerity measures, but these were extremely unpopular and failed to bring about significant change. Hitler took advantage of this fact, aiming his political message specifically at people who had been severely affected by the hyperinflation of the 1920s, those being farmers, war veterans, and the middle class. His message resonated with many Germans, and in 1932, he ran against Hindenburg in the presidential elections. He came in second in both rounds of elections, but the attempt established him, and the Nazi Party, as a strong political force.

Parliamentary elections in 1932 had failed to produce a majority government, and this, coupled with the lack of an effective government, prompted influential politicians Franz von Papen and Alfred Hugenberg, along with numerous industrialists

and businessmen, to write a letter urging Hindenburg to appoint Hitler as chancellor. Hindenburg reluctantly agreed after Hitler agreed to form what would be a short-lived coalition government merging the NSDAP with Hindenburg's party, the German National People's Party. When the agreement went into effect, the Nazi Party gained three posts; Hitler named Wilhelm Frick as Minister of Interior and Hermann Göring as Minister of the Interior for Prussia. He used these ministerial positions to gain control over the police in many parts of Germany.

As chancellor, Hitler used his position to prevent the attempts by opponents of the Nazi Party to form a majority government. As a result of his efforts, a government stalemate ensued and Hitler urged Hindenburg to dissolve the Reichstag, the German parliament. In March of 1933, the Reichstag building was set on fire and members of Germany's Communist party were blamed. At this time, Hitler was successful in getting Hindenburg to issue the Reichstag Fire Decree, which suspended the basic rights of Germany's citizens and allowed for detention without trial. The decree was legal under the Weimar Constitution, which allowed the president to take emergency actions in the name of public safety. After the decree went into effect, the activities of the German Communist Party were suppressed and several thousand Communist party members were arrested.

During this time, the Nazi Party increased their share of the vote to 43.9%, and though they failed to secure an absolute majority, it was the party with the largest numbers of seats in

parliament. In order to achieve full control over the government, the Nazi Party brought the Enabling Act to a vote. The Act, which was officially titled, "Law to Remedy the Distress of People and Reich," provided Hitler's cabinet with the power to enact laws without the consent of parliament for four years, and it provided for the enactment of laws that deviated from the constitution. Because it affected the constitution, the Enabling Act required a two-thirds vote. The Nazis utilized the Reichstag Fire Decree to arrest 81 Communist deputies; additionally, they prevented numerous Social Democrats from attending the vote, all of which resulted in the successful passage of the law with a vote of 441-84. This effectively transformed Hitler's government into a legal dictatorship.

After successfully attaining control over the executive and legislative branches of the German government, Hitler and the Nazis began to suppress any remaining opposition to their rule. The Social Democratic Party was banned, SA stormtroopers demolished union offices, and trade unions were forced to dissolve while their leaders were arrested. By the end of June in 1933, other political parties had been effectively intimidated into disbanding, and the NSDAP was declared the only legal party in Germany. When the SA demanded more political and military power, Hitler purged the leadership by executing the leaders, including long-time supporters and allies, in what was known as the Night of the Long Knives, which took place between June 30 and July 2, 1934. At least 85 people were killed and more than a thousand perceived opponents were arrested. The name the Night of the Long Knives is a German phrase that predated

this event, one that refers in general to acts of vengeance. Despite the fact that the international community was shocked by this event, many Germans believed that Hitler was restoring order.

When Hindenburg died on August 2, 1934, a law that had been passed only the previous day by Hitler's cabinet, the Law Concerning the Highest State Office in the Reich, went into effect, eliminating the office of the president and providing that its powers be merged with those of the chancellor. Hitler then became both head of the state as well as head of the government with formal titles of Führer und Reichskanzler – leader and chancellor. By merging these two roles in the German government, Hitler eliminated the last legal means by which he could have been removed from office. As head of state, he became the supreme commander of the armed forces, and he began preparations for war.

In August of 1934, Hitler tasked his new Minister of Economics, Hjalmar Schacht, with preparing an economy for war. He financed paying for reconstruction and rearmament with Mefo bills, a type of promissory note, by printing more money, and by seizing the assets of people arrested as enemies of the State, many of whom were Jewish. As a result of his efforts, unemployment fell from six million in 1932 to one million in 1936. Hitler also began one of the largest infrastructure improvement campaigns in German history, which resulted in the construction of dams, highways, and railroads as well as other civil works. The average workweek increased, as Germany prepared for a war economy, to between 47 and 50 hours a

week. Additionally, wages dropped slightly and the cost of living increased by 25%.

Hitler also made numerous foreign policy changes in accordance with his goals. He enunciated his aims in a meeting with German leaders in February of 1933. They included annexing Austria, restoring the German national borders of 1914, rejecting the military restrictions set forth in the Treaty of Versailles, returning former German colonies in Africa, and the creation of a German zone of influence in Eastern Europe. At the time of that speech, Hitler emphasized peaceful goals and a willingness to work with international powers. In October of 1933, however, Germany withdrew from the League of Nations and the World Disarmament Conference. In January of 1935, the overwhelming majority of the people of Saarland voted to unite with Germany, and in March, Hitler announced the expansion of the German armed forces to 600,000 members, six times the 100,000 permitted under the Treaty of Versailles. Though the League of Nations condemned these actions, they did nothing to stop them. Hitler was then allowed to increase the tonnage of the German navy to 35% of that of the British navy under the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of June 18, 1935. The action set the stage for the Treaty of Versailles to become irrelevant, and it is worth noting that neither France nor Italy was consulted before the agreement was signed.

In March of 1936, Germany reoccupied the demilitarized zone in the Rhineland and Hitler sent troops to support General Franco during the Spanish Civil War. In August of that year, Hitler ordered Göring, his Minister of the Interior for Prussia, to

implement a four-year plan to prepare Germany for war. Hitler saw the war plan as an all-out struggle between Judeo-Bolshevism and German National Socialism, and to his mind, that required a full commitment regardless of the economic cost. In November of that year, Germany and Japan signed an anti-Communism pact. Britain, China, Italy, and Poland were all invited to sign the pact as well, but only Italy did so in 1937. After trying for a number of years to create an Anglo-German alliance that included Britain, Hitler abandoned that plan, blaming inadequate British leadership for its failure. In November of 1937, Hitler restated his intentions to seize Austria and Czechoslovakia and ordered preparations for a war that was to begin as early as 1938 and no later than 1943. At that time, he dismissed his foreign minister and assumed the role himself as he worked toward carrying out his foreign policy aimed at war.

By February of 1938, Hitler had removed more than 28 generals who had objected to his plans. He had replaced his War Minister, Field Marshal Werner von Blomberg, as Commander-in-Chief, which gave him personal command of the armed forces. He took great care to make sure that his dictatorship appeared legal, basing many of his decisions to remove or replace government officials on the Reichstag Fire Decree. Throughout the remainder of 1938, Hitler took a number of steps toward war. He announced the unification of Germany and Austria and set his sights on the ethnic German population of Sudetenland, a region of Czechoslovakia. Through a series of secret meetings and sabre-rattling, he

secured an agreement with Czechoslovakia whereby the Sudetenland territories were handed over to Germany in September 1938. By the end of 1938, however, an economic crisis that resulted from the rearmament effort forced Hitler to make defense cuts. He responded by calling for an economic offensive to increase German foreign exchange holdings. As a result of this economic crisis and the need for additional assets, Hitler ordered the Wehrmacht, the German armed forces, to invade Prague, after which he proclaimed Bohemia and Moravia as German protectorates.

Hitler then set his sights on defeating Poland, as he believed that to be the necessary step toward defeating Germany's main enemy, Britain. On August 22, 1939, he ordered military mobilization against Poland, and on September 1, 1939, Germany invaded western Poland under the pretext that Poland had violated certain provisions of the Versailles Treaty. Despite assurances Hitler received prior to the invasion of Poland, Britain and France declared war on Germany on September 3, 1939. Thus began World War II.

After Germany's invasion of western Poland, Soviet forces invaded eastern Poland. Britain and France failed to act on their declaration of war immediately, and Poland fell to the invading forces. Hitler immediately began systematic ethnic cleansing of the Polish population, in some cases completely eliminating entire Polish communities in order to establish racial purity. It was only the beginning of a brutal genocidal campaign that Hitler and his emissaries would wage over the next six years.

Hitler proceeded to invade Denmark and Norway in April

of 1940, after which he proclaimed the birth of the Greater Germanic Reich, in which Dutch, Flemish, and Scandinavians were joined as a so-called racially pure polity under German rule. In May of that year, Germany invaded France and conquered Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Belgium. Hitler's victories prompted Mussolini to join Italy's forces with Germany's in June of that year. Hitler made peace overtures to Winston Churchill, the new British Prime Minister, but upon Churchill's rejection, ordered a series of aerial attacks on the Royal Air Force bases and radar stations in southeast England. By the end of October, Hitler realized that he would not be able to secure air superiority for an invasion of Britain and instead ordered nightly air raids on British cities, including London.

In 1941 Hitler, as he commonly did, contravened a non-aggression pact signed in 1939 with Stalin, then leader of the Soviet Union, by sending 4 to 5 million Axis troops to attack the Baltic republics, Belarus, and western Ukraine. The Axis powers consisted of Germany, Japan, Italy, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria. Also, in the spring of 1941, Hitler deployed German forces to North Africa, the Balkans, and the Middle East as well as Yugoslavia and Greece. Though Hitler was able to conquer a huge area of the Soviet Union, he was ultimately not successful, and his offensive against Moscow ended disastrously in December of 1941 with over a million casualties (more than 600,000 Soviet casualties and over 400,000 German casualties). Stalin was successful in repelling the German offensive against Moscow, handing Hitler a major defeat. Germany had, however, conquered a large amount of

Russian territory, and when asked what should be done with the Jews of Russia, Hitler responded, “exterminate them as partisans.” Historians note this remark is the closest to a definitive order from Hitler regarding the genocide carried out during the Holocaust.

On December 7, 1941, Japanese forces attacked the United States naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. On December 8, 1941, in a speech in which he described the Japanese attack as “a day which will live in infamy,” US President Franklin D. Roosevelt declared war with the Empire of Japan. Hitler declared war on the United States on December 11, 1941, and hours after doing so, the United States declared war on Germany.

In 1942, Hitler suffered a series of defeats and became increasingly distrustful of his commanders. He began to interfere in their planning with damaging results. His refusal, for example, to allow the withdrawal of forces at the Battle of Stalingrad led to the almost total destruction of the 6th Army with over 200,000 Axis soldiers killed and 235,000 taken prisoner. His military judgment became increasingly erratic, which resulted in the deterioration of Germany’s military and economic position and the deterioration of Hitler’s own health.

In 1943, Mussolini was removed from power after the allied invasion of Sicily, and throughout 1943 and 1944, Hitler’s armies were forced into retreat by the Soviet Union. In Operation Overlord, the Allied forces launched an ultimately successful amphibious attack in northern France, commencing

on D-Day, June 6, 1944. Following this, many German officers saw defeat as inevitable and concluded that continuing under Hitler's rule would result in the complete destruction of Germany. While there had been many plans to assassinate Hitler throughout the war, the increasing prospect of Germany's defeat at this time produced the most well-known attempt from within Germany. As part of Operation Valkyrie, a bomb was planted in Hitler's headquarters. Hitler only narrowly survived because a staff officer moved the briefcase containing the bomb behind the leg of a heavy conference table, thus deflecting the blast and shielding Hitler. Hitler executed more than 4,900 people following this attempt on his life.

By late in 1944, both the Allied forces and the Red Army of the Soviet Union were advancing into Germany. Hitler perceived the forces of the United States and Britain to be far weaker than those of the Red Army, and he concentrated his remaining mobile reserves on defeating their advance. Hitler had hoped for disunity among the Allied forces after the death of Franklin D. Roosevelt in April of 1945. No such disunity occurred, however, and Hitler, who believed that because of Germany's military failures, it had forfeited its right to exist as a nation, ordered the destruction of the German infrastructure so that it wouldn't fall into Allied hands. His Minister for Armaments, Albert Speer, was supposed to execute the scorched earth policy, but he disobeyed the order. Thinking Speer would follow his order, Hitler made his last trip from the Führerbunker, or "Führer's Shelter," on April 20, his 56th

birthday. He awarded several Iron Crosses to child soldiers of the Hitler Youth, and after hearing of the advance of Russian forces to the outskirts of Berlin ordered the underequipped and undermanned Army Detachment Steiner to attack the northern flank while the Ninth Army would attack northward. On April 22, when he asked about the attack, he was told it had not been launched, and the Soviets had entered Berlin. After a tirade about the incompetence and treachery of his commanders, Hitler, for the first time, declared that “everything was lost”.

The Red Army had surrounded Berlin by April 23, and at that time, Göring argued that since Hitler was isolated in Berlin, he should assume leadership of Germany. Hitler had him arrested, and in his last will and testament, removed him from all government positions. He also ordered Himmler, the head of the SS (Hitler’s personal bodyguard unit), arrested after discovering that he was trying to negotiate a surrender to the western Allied forces. On April 29, 1945, Hitler married his long-time companion, Eva Braun, in a civil ceremony in his bunker, and he dictated his last will to his secretary Traudl Junge. Later in the day, he was informed of Mussolini’s execution, which many believe increased his will to avoid capture. On April 30, with Soviet forces within blocks of the Reich Chancellery, Hitler shot himself and Eva Braun bit into a cyanide capsule. Their bodies were carried to a bombed-out garden behind the Chancellery, doused with gas, and set on fire as the shelling continued. Berlin surrendered on May 2 to Soviet forces, and Germany surrendered to Allied forces on May 7,

1945. Japan continued to fight Allied forces until after atomic bombs were dropped on two Japanese cities by US forces. Their surrender was signed on September 2, 1945. Records obtained from the Soviet archives after the fall of the Soviet Union state that Hitler and Braun's remains, along with those of Joseph and Magda Goebbels and the six Goebbels children, General Hans Krebs, and Hitler's dogs were repeatedly buried and exhumed. According to these records, both Hitler and Braun's corpses were fully burned by the time the Red Army found them.

Conclusion

Adolf Hitler and his Nazi collaborators instituted policies that were ultimately responsible for the deaths of over 29 million people during World War II. Throughout his life, Hitler had developed the viewpoint that the Jewish people were the enemy of the German people and that Jews, along with Slavic people, were preventing the Aryan people of Germany from assuming their rightful role as the superior race. In accordance with those beliefs, when Hitler assumed power in Germany and started World War II, he instituted a number of policies aimed at exterminating Jews and other so-called inferior or non-pure races. He and his emissaries established scores of concentration and extermination camps throughout Europe where most of the killing was carried out.

Mass killings took place in gas chambers disguised as showers, through brutal executions, and by systematic starvation. Between 1939 and 1945, the SS, with the assistance of collaborating governments and recruits from occupied countries, killed at least 11 million people, including between 5.5 and 6 million Jews, some two-thirds of the Jewish population of Europe. Killed also were between 200,000 and 1,500,000 Romani people. In addition to exterminating the Jews, the Nazis instituted a plan to reduce the population of their conquered territories by 30 million people. The plan called for starving people to death by diverting food supplies to the

German army and German civilians, razing cities, and allowing the land to return to forests or to be resettled by German colonists. Their partially realized plans resulted in the deaths of an estimated 19.3 million civilians and prisoners of war, including the deaths of nearly 2 million Polish citizens and over 3 million Soviet prisoners of war, Communists, homosexuals, and physically and mentally disabled persons. When these deaths are added to the war casualties, over 60 million people, or 3% of the world's population, died during World War II.

As if all that wasn't enough, Hitler's eugenic policies targeted children as well as adults for gruesome experiments designed to aid German military personnel, to develop new weapons, and to advance the Nazi racial ideology by attempting to "cure" the victims of their impurities. The experiments included such horrors as the removal of bone, nerve, and muscle tissue from selected areas of the body, the injection of dyes into the eyes, and repeatedly hitting children in the head with a hammer. Other subjects were frozen, infected with diseases, and exposed to mustard gas. The experiments often resulted in the death, trauma, disfigurement, mutilation, or permanent disability of the test subjects, and are considered medical torture.

Upon Hitler's death, support for him and the Nazi Party collapsed. The war left behind a devastated and impoverished eastern and central Europe, and Germany suffered wholesale destruction. The human suffering incurred as a result of Hitler and the Nazi Party's policies was unprecedented, and his actions and the Nazi ideology are today almost universally

considered gravely immoral. In an effort to ensure justice for the victims of these atrocities, surviving Nazis who escaped when the war ended have been hunted down and prosecuted for their crimes. Many are still hunted to this day. As a result of Hitler's actions and what some perceive as the delayed response on the part of the Allied forces, many countries have designed early warning systems to alert policymakers and the public to locations where the risk of mass atrocities is greatest, and they have also instituted a policy outlining the global responsibility to protect world populations against genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing. Perhaps the sentiment was best expressed by noted Holocaust survivor turned Nazi hunter, Simon Wiesenthal: "for evil to flourish, it only requires good men to do nothing."

More than anything else, Hitler proved that monsters do exist, but sadly, they aren't as obvious as how they are depicted in horror movies. They have very human faces, and often have lived all too human lives, sometimes marked by conflict and pain, but as was the case with Hitler's relationship with his mother and his sisters, not always devoid of love. Humanity may not always be able to predict who among us will become a monster or why, but after witnessing the atrocities committed by Adolf Hitler, perhaps the resolve to prevent such horrors in the future has been strengthened.

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