

Adolf Hitler Biography.com

Dictator, Military Leader(1889–1945)

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NAME

Adolf Hitler

OCCUPATION

Dictator, Military Leader

BIRTH DATE

April 20, 1889

DEATH DATE

April 30, 1945

DID YOU KNOW?

Adolf Hitler wanted to be a painter in his youth, but his applications to obtain proper schooling were rejected.

DID YOU KNOW?

Hitler personally designed the Nazi party banner, appropriating the swastika symbol and placing it in a white circle on a red background.

DID YOU KNOW?

Hitler was a vegan.

DID YOU KNOW?

Hitler avoided multiple assassination attempts by chance.

PLACE OF BIRTH

Braunau am Inn, Austria

PLACE OF DEATH

Berlin, Germany

WHO WAS ADOLF HITLER?

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Adolf Hitler was the leader of Nazi Germany from 1934 to 1945. He initiated fascist policies that led to World War II and the deaths of at least 11 million people, including the mass murder of an estimated 6 million Jews.

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FAMOUS PEOPLE IN WORLD WAR II

FAMOUS GERMAN POLITICAL LEADERS

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QUOTES

“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

Who Was Adolf Hitler?

Adolf Hitler (April 20, 1889 to April 30, 1945) was chancellor of Germany from 1933 to 1945, serving as dictator and leader of the Nazi Party, or National Socialist German Workers Party, for

the bulk of his time in power. Hitler's policies precipitated World War II and led to the genocide known as the Holocaust, which resulted in the deaths of some six million Jews and another five million noncombatants. With defeat on the horizon, Hitler committed suicide with wife Eva Braun on April 30, 1945, in his Berlin bunker.

Hitler in Upper Bavaria, Germany, late 1930s.

(Photo: Hugo Jaeger/Timepix/The LIFE Picture Collection/Getty Images)

### Birthday

Adolf Hitler was born in Braunau am Inn, Austria, on April 20, 1889.

### Family

The fourth of six children, Adolf Hitler was born to Alois Hitler and Klara Polzl. As a child, Hitler clashed frequently with his emotionally harsh father, who also didn't approve of his son's later interest in fine art as a career. Following the death of his younger brother, Edmund, in 1900, Hitler became detached and introverted.

### Early Life and Painting

Hitler showed an early interest in German nationalism, rejecting the authority of Austria-Hungary. This nationalism would become the motivating force of Hitler's life.

In 1903, Hitler's father died suddenly. Two years later, Adolf's mother allowed her son to drop out of school. After her death in December 1907, Hitler moved to Vienna and worked as a casual laborer and watercolor painter. Hitler applied to the Academy of Fine Arts twice and was rejected both times. Lacking money outside of an orphan's pension and funds from selling postcards, he stayed in homeless shelters. Hitler later pointed to these years as the time when

he first cultivated his anti-Semitism, though there is some debate about this account.

In 1913, Hitler relocated to Munich. At the outbreak of World War I, he applied to serve in the German army. He was accepted in August 1914, though he was still an Austrian citizen. Although Hitler spent much of his time away from the front lines (with some reports that his recollections of his time on the field were generally exaggerated), he was present at a number of significant battles and was wounded at the Somme. He was decorated for bravery, receiving the Iron Cross First Class and the Black Wound Badge.

Hitler became embittered over the collapse of the war effort. The experience reinforced his passionate German patriotism, and he was shocked by Germany's surrender in 1918. Like other German nationalists, he purportedly believed that the German army had been betrayed by civilian leaders and Marxists. He found the Treaty of Versailles degrading, particularly the demilitarization of the Rhineland and the stipulation that Germany accept responsibility for starting the war.

#### Hitler and the Nazis

After World War I, Hitler returned to Munich and continued to work for the German military. As an intelligence officer, he monitored the activities of the German Workers' Party (DAP) and adopted many of the anti-Semitic, nationalist and anti-Marxist ideas of party founder Anton Drexler. In September 1919, Hitler joined the DAP, which changed its name to the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (NSDAP) — often abbreviated to Nazi.

Hitler personally designed the Nazi party banner, appropriating the swastika symbol and placing it in a white circle on a red background. He soon gained notoriety for his vitriolic speeches against the Treaty of Versailles, rival politicians, Marxists and Jews. In 1921, Hitler replaced Drexler as the Nazi party chairman.

Hitler's fervid beer-hall speeches began attracting regular audiences. Early followers included army captain Ernst Rohm, the head of the Nazi paramilitary organization the Sturmabteilung (SA), which protected meetings and frequently attacked political opponents.

## Beer Hall Putsch

On November 8, 1923, Hitler and the SA stormed a public meeting featuring Bavarian prime minister Gustav Kahr at a large beer hall in Munich. Hitler announced that the national revolution had begun and declared the formation of a new government. After a short struggle that led to several deaths, the coup known as the "Beer Hall Putsch" failed. Hitler was arrested and tried for high treason and sentenced to nine months in prison.

## Hitler's Book, 'Mein Kampf'

During Hitler's nine months in prison in 1924, he dictated most of the first volume of his autobiographical book and political manifesto, *Mein Kampf* ("My Struggle"), to his deputy, Rudolf Hess. The first volume was published in 1925, and a second volume came out in 1927. It was abridged and translated into 11 languages, selling more than five million copies by 1939. A work of propaganda and falsehoods, the book laid out Hitler's plans for transforming German society into one based on race.

In the first volume, Hitler shared his Anti-Semitic, pro-Aryan worldview along with his sense of "betrayal" at the outcome of World War I, calling for revenge against France and expansion eastward into Russia. The second volume outlined his plan to gain and maintain power. While often illogical and full of grammatical errors, *Mein Kampf* was provocative and subversive, making it appealing to the many Germans who felt displaced at the end of World War I.

## Rise to Power

With millions unemployed, the Great Depression in Germany provided a political opportunity for Hitler. Germans were ambivalent to the parliamentary republic and increasingly open to extremist options. In 1932, Hitler ran against 84-year-old Paul von Hindenburg for the presidency. Hitler came in second in both rounds of the election, garnering more than 36

percent of the vote in the final count. The results established Hitler as a strong force in German politics. Hindenburg reluctantly agreed to appoint Hitler as chancellor in order to promote political balance.

Hitler used his position as chancellor to form a de facto legal dictatorship. The Reichstag Fire Decree, announced after a suspicious fire at parliament, suspended basic rights and allowed detention without trial. Hitler also engineered the passage of the Enabling Act, which gave his cabinet full legislative powers for a period of four years and allowed for deviations from the constitution.

Having achieved full control over the legislative and executive branches of government, Hitler and his political allies embarked on a systematic suppression of the remaining political opposition. By the end of June, the other parties had been intimidated into disbanding. On July 14, 1933, Hitler's Nazi Party was declared the only legal political party in Germany. In October of that year, Hitler ordered Germany's withdrawal from the League of Nations.

Military opposition was also punished. The demands of the SA for more political and military power led to the Night of the Long Knives, which took place from June 30 to July 2, 1934. Rohm, a perceived rival, and other SA leaders, along with a number of Hitler's political enemies, were rounded up and shot.

The day before Hindenburg's death in August 1934, the cabinet had enacted a law abolishing the office of president, combining its powers with those of the chancellor. Hitler thus became head of state as well as head of government and was formally named leader and chancellor. As head of state, Hitler became supreme commander of the armed forces.

#### Hitler as a Vegan

Hitler's self-imposed dietary restrictions included abstinence from alcohol and meat (or veganism). Fueled by fanaticism over what he believed was a superior Aryan race, he encouraged Germans to keep their bodies pure of any intoxicating or unclean substances and promoted anti-smoking campaigns across the country.

## Hitler's Laws and Regulations Against Jews

From 1933 until the start of the war in 1939, Hitler and his Nazi regime instituted hundreds of laws and regulations to restrict and exclude Jews in society. These Anti-Semitic laws were issued throughout all levels of government, making good on the Nazis' pledge to persecute Jews.

On April 1, 1933, Hitler implemented a national boycott of Jewish businesses. This was followed by the "Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service" of April 7, 1933, which excluded Jews from state service. The law was a Nazi implementation of the Aryan Paragraph, which called for the exclusion of Jews and non-Aryans from organizations, employment and eventually all aspects of public life.

Antisemitism in Germany: on 1 April 1933 SA troopers urge a national boycott of Jewish businesses. Here they are outside Israel's Department Store in Berlin. The signs read: "Germans! Defend yourselves! Don't buy from Jews." ("Deutsche! Wehrt Euch! Kauft nicht bei Juden!"). The store was later ransacked during Kristallnacht in 1938, then handed over to a non-Jewish family.

Bundesarchiv, Bild 102-14469 / CC-BY-SA 3.0 [CC BY-SA 3.0 de (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/de/deed.en>)], via Wikimedia Commons

Additional legislation restricted the number of Jewish students at schools and universities, limited Jews working in medical and legal professions, and revoked the licenses of Jewish tax consultants. The Main Office for Press and Propaganda of the German Student Union also called for "Action Against the Un-German Spirit," prompting students to burn more than 25,000 "Un-German" books, ushering in an era of censorship and Nazi propaganda. By 1934, Jewish actors were forbidden from performing in film or in the theater.

On September 15, 1935, the Reichstag introduced the Nuremberg Laws, which defined a "Jew" as anyone with three or four grandparents who were Jewish, regardless of whether the person considered themselves Jewish or observed the religion. The Nuremberg Laws also set forth the "Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour," which banned marriage

between non-Jewish and Jewish Germans; and the Reich Citizenship Law, which deprived "non-Aryans" of the benefits of German citizenship.

In 1936, Hitler and his regime muted their Anti-Semitic rhetoric and actions when Germany hosted the Winter and Summer Olympic Games, in an effort to avoid criticism on the world stage and a negative impact on tourism.

After the Olympics, the Nazi persecution of Jews intensified with the continued "Aryanization" of Jewish businesses, which involved the firing of Jewish workers and takeover by non-Jewish owners. The Nazis continued to segregate Jews from German society, banning them from public school, universities, theaters, sports events and "Aryan" zones. Jewish doctors were also barred from treating "Aryan" patients. Jews were required to carry identity cards and, in the fall of 1938, Jewish people had to have their passports stamped with a "J."

On November 9 and 10, 1938, a wave of violent anti-Jewish pogroms swept Germany, Austria and parts of the Sudetenland. Nazis destroyed synagogues and vandalized Jewish homes, schools and businesses. Close to 100 Jews were murdered. Called Kristallnacht, the "Night of Crystal" or the "Night of Broken Glass," referring to the broken glass left in the wake of the destruction, it escalated the Nazi persecution of Jews to another level of brutality and violence. Almost 30,000 Jewish men were arrested and sent to concentration camps, signaling more horrors to come.

#### Persecution of Homosexuals and People with Disabilities

Hitler's eugenic policies also targeted children with physical and developmental disabilities, later authorizing a euthanasia program for disabled adults. His regime also persecuted homosexuals, arresting an estimated 100,000 men from 1933 to 1945, some of whom were imprisoned or sent to concentration camps. At the camps, gay prisoners were forced to wear pink triangles to identify their homosexuality, which Nazis considered a crime and a disease.

#### The Holocaust and Concentration Camps



Between the start of World War II, in 1939, and its end, in 1945, Nazis and their collaborators were responsible for the deaths of at least one million noncombatants, including about six million Jews, representing two-thirds of the Jewish population in Europe. As part of Hitler's "Final Solution," the genocide enacted by the regime would come to be known as the Holocaust.

German police shooting women and children from the Mizocz Ghetto, 14 October 1942.

By Gustav Hille [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons

Deaths and mass executions took place in concentration and extermination camps including Auschwitz-Birkenau, Bergen-Belsen, Dachau and Treblinka, among many others. Other persecuted groups included Poles, communists, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses and trade unionists. Prisoners were used as forced laborers for SS construction projects, and in some instances they were forced to build and expand concentration camps. They were subject to starvation, torture and horrific brutalities, including having to endure gruesome and painful medical experiments.

Hitler probably never visited the concentration camps and did not speak publicly about the mass killings. However Germans documented the atrocities committed at the camps on paper and in films.

## World War II

In 1938, Hitler, along with several other European leaders, signed the Munich Agreement. The treaty ceded the Sudetenland districts to Germany, reversing part of the Versailles Treaty. As a result of the summit, Hitler was named Time magazine's Man of the Year for 1938.

This diplomatic win only whetted his appetite for a renewed German dominance. On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland, sparking the beginning of World War II. In response, Britain

and France declared war on Germany two days later.

In 1940 Hitler escalated his military activities, invading Norway, Denmark, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Belgium. By July, Hitler ordered bombing raids on the United Kingdom, with the goal of invasion. Germany's formal alliance with Japan and Italy, known collectively as the Axis powers, was agreed upon toward the end of September to deter the United States from supporting and protecting the British.

On June 22, 1941, Hitler violated the 1939 non-aggression pact with Joseph Stalin, sending a massive army of German troops into the Soviet Union. The invading force seized a huge area of Russia before Hitler temporarily halted the invasion and diverted forces to encircle Leningrad and Kiev. The pause allowed the Red Army to regroup and conduct a counter-offensive attack, and the German advance was stopped outside Moscow in December 1941.

On December 7, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. Honoring the alliance with Japan, Hitler was now at war against the Allied powers, a coalition that included Britain, the world's largest empire, led by Prime Minister Winston Churchill; the United States, the world's greatest financial power, led by President Franklin D. Roosevelt; and the Soviet Union, which had the world's largest army, commanded by Stalin.

Though initially hoping that he could play the Allies off of one another, Hitler's military judgment became increasingly erratic, and the Axis powers could not sustain his aggressive and expansive war. In late

On June 6, 1944, on what would come to be known as D-Day, the Western Allied armies landed in northern France. As a result of these significant setbacks, many German officers concluded that defeat was inevitable and that Hitler's continued rule would result in the destruction of the country. Organized efforts to assassinate the dictator gained traction, and opponents came close in 1944 with

the notorious [July Plot](#), though it ultimately proved unsuccessful.

### **How and When Did Hitler Die?**

By early 1945, Hitler realized that Germany was going to lose the war. The Soviets had driven the German army back into Western Europe and the Allies were advancing into Germany from the west. At midnight, going into April 29, 1945, Hitler married his girlfriend, [Eva Braun](#), in a small civil ceremony in his Berlin bunker. Around this time, Hitler was informed of the execution of Italian dictator [Benito Mussolini](#). Afraid of falling into the hands of enemy troops, Hitler and Braun committed suicide the day after their wedding, on April 30, 1945. Their bodies were carried to a bombed-out area outside of the Reich Chancellery, where they were burned.

Berlin fell on May 2, 1945. Five days later, on May 7, 1945, Germany surrendered unconditionally to the Allies.

### **After Hitler's Death**

Hitler's political programs brought about a world war, leaving behind a devastated and impoverished Eastern and Central Europe, including Germany. His policies inflicted human suffering on an unprecedented scale and resulted in the death of tens of millions of people, including more than 20 million in the Soviet Union and six million Jews in Europe. Hitler's defeat marked the end of Germany's dominance in European history and the defeat of

fascism. A new ideological global conflict, the Cold War, emerged in the aftermath of the devastating violence of World War II.