

= Hermann Göring =

Hermann Wilhelm Göring ( or Goering ; German : [ ˈɡøʁɪŋ ] ; 12 January 1893 ? 15 October 1946 ) was a German politician , military leader , and leading member of the Nazi Party ( NSDAP ) . A veteran World War I fighter pilot ace , he was a recipient of the coveted Pour le Mérite , also known as the " Blue Max " . He was the last commander of Jagdgeschwader 1 , the fighter wing once led by Manfred von Richthofen .

A member of the NSDAP from its earliest days , Göring was wounded in 1923 during the failed coup known as the Beer Hall Putsch . He became addicted to morphine after being treated with the drug for his injuries . After helping Adolf Hitler take power in 1933 , he became the second @-@ most powerful man in Germany . He founded the Gestapo in 1933 , and later gave command of it to Heinrich Himmler . Göring was appointed commander @-@ in @-@ chief of the Luftwaffe ( air force ) in 1935 , a position he held until the final days of World War II . By 1940 , he was at the peak of his power and influence ; as minister in charge of the Four Year Plan , he was responsible for much of the functioning of the German economy in the build @-@ up to World War II . Hitler promoted him to the rank of Reichsmarschall , a rank senior to all other Wehrmacht commanders , and in 1941 Hitler designated him as his successor and deputy in all his offices .

Göring 's standing with Hitler was reduced by the beginning of 1943 , when the Luftwaffe failed to stop the Allied bombing of German cities and was unable to resupply German forces trapped in the Battle of Stalingrad . Göring largely withdrew from the military and political scene and focused on the acquisition of property and artwork , much of which was taken from Jewish victims of the Holocaust . Informed on 22 April 1945 that Hitler intended to commit suicide , Göring sent a telegram to Hitler requesting permission to assume control of the Reich . Considering it an act of treason , Hitler removed Göring from all his positions , expelled him from the party , and ordered his arrest .

After World War II , Göring was convicted of war crimes and crimes against humanity at the Nuremberg trials . He was sentenced to death by hanging , but committed suicide by ingesting cyanide the night before the sentence was to be carried out .

= = Early life = =

Göring was born on 12 January 1893 at the Marienbad Sanatorium in Rosenheim , Bavaria . His father , Heinrich Ernst Göring ( 31 October 1839 ? 7 December 1913 ) , a former cavalry officer , had been the first Governor @-@ General of the German protectorate of South @-@ West Africa , ( modern @-@ day Namibia ) . Heinrich had five children from a previous marriage . Göring was the fourth of five children by Heinrich 's second wife , Franziska Tiefenbrunn ( 1859 ? 15 July 1943 ) , a Bavarian peasant . Göring 's elder siblings were Karl , Olga , and Paula ; his younger brother was Albert . At the time that Göring was born , his father was serving as consul general in Haiti , and his mother had returned home briefly to give birth . She left the six @-@ week @-@ old baby with a friend in Bavaria and did not see the child again for three years , when she and Heinrich returned to Germany .

Göring 's godfather was Dr. Hermann Epenstein , a wealthy Jewish physician and businessman his father had met in Africa . Epenstein provided the Göring family , who were surviving on Heinrich 's pension , first with a family home in Berlin @-@ Friedenau , then in a small castle called Veldenstein , near Nuremberg . Göring 's mother became Epenstein 's mistress around this time , and remained so for some fifteen years . Epenstein acquired the minor title of Ritter von Epenstein through service and donations to the Crown .

Interested in a career as a soldier from a very early age , Göring enjoyed playing with toy soldiers and dressing up in a Boer uniform his father had given him . He was sent to boarding school at age eleven , where the food was poor and discipline was harsh . He sold a violin to pay for his train ticket home , and then took to his bed , feigning illness , until he was told he would not have to return . He continued to enjoy war games , pretending to lay siege to the castle Veldenstein and studying Teutonic legends and sagas . He became a mountain climber , scaling peaks in Germany , at the Mont Blanc massif , and in the Austrian Alps . At sixteen he was sent to a military academy at Berlin

Lichterfelde , from which he graduated with distinction ( During the Nuremberg war @-@ crimes trials In 1946 , psychologist Gustave Gilbert measured him as having an intelligence quotient ( IQ ) of 138 . ) Göring joined the Prince Wilhelm Regiment ( 112th Infantry ) of the Prussian army in 1912 . The next year his mother had a falling @-@ out with Epenstein . The family was forced to leave Veldenstein and moved to Munich ; Göring 's father died shortly afterwards . When World War I began in August 1914 , Göring was stationed at Mulhouse with his regiment .

= = World War I = =

During the first year of World War I , Göring served with his infantry regiment in the area of Mülhausen , a garrison town less than 2 km from the French frontier . He was hospitalized with rheumatism , a result of the damp of trench warfare . While he was recovering , his friend Bruno Loerzer convinced him to transfer to what would become , by October 1916 , the Luftstreitkräfte ( " air combat force " ) of the German army , but his request was turned down . Later that year , Göring flew as Loerzer 's observer in Feldflieger Abteilung 25 ( FFA 25 ) ? Göring had informally transferred himself . He was discovered and sentenced to three weeks ' confinement to barracks , but the sentence was never carried out . By the time it was supposed to be imposed , Göring 's association with Loerzer had been made official . They were assigned as a team to FFA 25 in the Crown Prince 's Fifth Army . They flew reconnaissance and bombing missions , for which the Crown Prince invested both Göring and Loerzer with the Iron Cross , first class .

After completing the pilot 's training course , Göring was assigned to Jagdstaffel 5 . Seriously wounded in the hip in aerial combat , he took nearly a year to recover . He then was transferred to Jagdstaffel 26 , commanded by Loerzer , in February 1917 . He steadily scored air victories until May , when he was assigned to command Jagdstaffel 27 . Serving with Jastas 5 , 26 , and 27 , he continued to win victories . In addition to his Iron Crosses ( 1st and 2nd Class ) , he received the Zaehring Lion with swords , the Friedrich Order , the House Order of Hohenzollern with swords third class , and finally , in May 1918 , the coveted Pour le Mérite . According to Hermann Dahlmann , who knew both men , Göring had Loerzer lobby for the award . He finished the war with 22 victories . A thorough post @-@ war examination of Allied loss records showed that only two of his claimed victories were doubtful . Three were possible and 17 were certain , or highly likely .

On 7 July 1918 , following the death of Wilhelm Reinhard , successor to Manfred von Richthofen , Göring was made commander of the famed " Flying Circus " , Jagdgeschwader 1 . His arrogance made him unpopular with the men of his squadron .

In the last days of the war , Göring was repeatedly ordered to withdraw his squadron , first to Tellancourt airdrome , then to Darmstadt . At one point , he was ordered to surrender the aircraft to the Allies ; he refused . Many of his pilots intentionally crash @-@ landed their planes to keep them from falling into enemy hands .

Like many other German veterans , Göring was a proponent of the Stab @-@ in @-@ the @-@ back legend , the belief which held that the German Army had not really lost the war , but instead was betrayed by the civilian leadership : Marxists , Jews , and especially the Republicans , who had overthrown the German monarchy .

= = After World War I = =

Göring remained in aviation after the war . He tried barnstorming and briefly worked at Fokker . After spending most of 1919 living in Denmark , he moved to Sweden and joined Svensk Lufttrafik , a Swedish airline . Göring was often hired for private flights . During the winter of 1920 ? 1921 , he was hired by Count Eric von Rosen to fly him to his castle from Stockholm . Invited to spend the night , Göring may at this time have first seen the swastika emblem , which Rosen had set in the chimney piece as a family badge .

This was also the first time that Göring saw his future wife ; the count introduced his sister @-@ in @-@ law , Baroness Carin von Kantzow ( née Freiin von Fock ) . Estranged from her husband of ten years , she had an eight @-@ year @-@ old son . Göring was immediately infatuated and

asked her to meet him in Stockholm . They arranged a visit at the home of her parents and spent much time together through 1921 , when Göring left for Munich to take political science at the university . Carin obtained a divorce , followed Göring to Munich , and married him on 3 February 1922 . Their first home together was a hunting lodge at Hochkreuth in the Bavarian Alps , near Bayrischzell , some 80 kilometres ( 50 mi ) from Munich . After Göring met Adolf Hitler and joined the Nazi Party ( NSDAP ) in 1922 , they moved to Obermenzing , a suburb of Munich .

= = Early Nazi career = =

Göring joined the Nazi Party in 1923 after hearing a speech by Hitler . He was given command of the Sturmabteilung ( SA ) as the Oberster SA @-@ Führer in 1923 . He was later appointed an SA @-@ Gruppenführer ( Lieutenant General ) and held this rank on the SA rolls until 1945 . At this time , Carin ? who liked Hitler ? often played hostess to meetings of leading Nazis , including her husband , Hitler , Rudolf Hess , Alfred Rosenberg , and Ernst Röhm . Hitler later recalled his early association with Göring :

I liked him . I made him the head of my SA . He is the only one of its heads that ran the SA properly . I gave him a dishevelled rabble . In a very short time he had organised a division of 11 @,@ 000 men .

Hitler and the Nazi Party held mass meetings and rallies in Munich and elsewhere during the early 1920s , attempting to gain supporters in a bid for political power . Inspired by Benito Mussolini 's March on Rome , the Nazis attempted to seize power on 8 ? 9 November 1923 in a failed coup known as the Beer Hall Putsch . Göring , who was with Hitler heading up the march to the War Ministry , was shot in the leg . Fourteen Nazis and four policemen were killed ; many top Nazis , including Hitler , were arrested . With Carin 's help , Göring was smuggled to Innsbruck , where he received surgery and was given morphine for the pain . He remained in hospital until 24 December . This was the beginning of his morphine addiction , which lasted until his imprisonment at Nuremberg . Meanwhile , the authorities in Munich declared Göring a wanted man . The Görings ? acutely short of funds and reliant on the good will of Nazi sympathizers abroad ? moved from Austria to Venice . In May 1924 they visited Rome , via Florence and Siena . Göring met Mussolini , who expressed an interest in meeting Hitler , who was by then in prison .

Personal problems continued to multiply . By 1925 , Carin 's mother was ill . The Görings ? with difficulty ? raised the money in the spring of 1925 for a journey to Sweden via Austria , Czechoslovakia , Poland , and Danzig ( now Gda?sk ) . Göring had become a violent morphine addict ; Carin 's family were shocked by his deterioration . Carin , who was ill with epilepsy and a weak heart , had to allow the doctors to take charge of Göring ; her son was taken by his father . Göring was certified a dangerous drug addict and was placed in Långbro asylum on 1 September 1925 . He was violent to the point where he had to be confined to a straitjacket , but his psychiatrist felt he was sane ; the condition was caused solely by the morphine . Weaned off the drug , he left the facility briefly , but had to return for further treatment . He returned to Germany when an amnesty was declared in 1927 and resumed working in the aircraft industry . Hitler , who had written Mein Kampf while in prison , had been released in December 1924 . Carin Göring , ill with epilepsy and tuberculosis , died of heart failure on 17 October 1931 .

Meanwhile , the NSDAP was in a period of rebuilding and waiting . The economy had recovered , which meant fewer opportunities for the Nazis to agitate for change . The SA was reorganised , but with Franz Pfeffer von Salomon as its head rather than Göring , and the Schutzstaffel ( SS ) was founded in 1925 , initially as a bodyguard for Hitler . Membership in the party increased from 27 @,@ 000 in 1925 to 108 @,@ 000 in 1928 and 178 @,@ 000 in 1929 . In the May 1928 elections the party only obtained twelve seats out of an available 491 . Göring was elected as a representative from Bavaria . The Wall Street Crash of 1929 led to a disastrous downturn in the German economy , and in the next election , the NSDAP won 6 @,@ 409 @,@ 600 votes and 107 seats in the Reichstag . In May 1931 , Hitler sent Göring on a mission to the Vatican , where he met the future Pope Pius XII .

In the July 1932 election , the Nazis won 230 seats to become far and away the largest party in the

Reichstag . Per longstanding tradition , the Nazis were thus entitled to select the President of the Reichstag , and were able to elect Göring for the post .

= = Reichstag fire = =

The Reichstag fire occurred on the night of 27 February 1933 . Göring was one of the first to arrive on the scene . Marinus van der Lubbe ? a communist radical ? was arrested and claimed sole responsibility for the fire . Göring immediately called for a crackdown on communists .

The Nazis took advantage of the fire to advance their own political aims . The Reichstag Fire Decree , passed the next day on Hitler 's urging , suspended basic rights and allowed detention without trial . Activities of the German Communist Party were suppressed , and some 4 @, @ 000 communist party members were arrested . Göring demanded that the detainees should be shot , but Rudolf Diels , head of the Prussian political police , ignored the order . Some researchers , including William L. Shirer and Alan Bullock , are of the opinion that the NSDAP itself was responsible for starting the fire .

At the Nuremberg trials , General Franz Halder testified that Göring admitted responsibility for starting the fire . He said that , at a luncheon held on Hitler 's birthday in 1942 , Göring said , " The only one who really knows about the Reichstag is I , because I set it on fire ! " In his own Nuremberg testimony , Göring denied this story .

= = Second marriage = =

During the early 1930s , Göring was often in the company of Emmy Sonnemann , an actress from Hamburg . They were married on 10 April 1935 in Berlin ; the wedding was celebrated on a huge scale . A large reception was held the night before at the Berlin Opera House . Fighter aircraft flew overhead on the night of the reception and the day of the ceremony . Göring 's daughter , Edda , was born on 2 June 1938 .

= = Nazi potentate = =

When Hitler was named chancellor of Germany in January 1933 , Göring was appointed as minister without portfolio , Minister of the Interior for Prussia , and Reich Commissioner of Aviation . Wilhelm Frick was named Reich Interior Minister . Frick and head of the Schutzstaffel ( SS ) Heinrich Himmler hoped to create a unified police force for all of Germany , but Göring on 30 November 1933 established a Prussian police force , with Rudolf Diels at its head . The force was called the Geheime Staatspolizei , or Gestapo . Göring , thinking that Diels was not ruthless enough to use the Gestapo effectively to counteract the power of the SA , handed over control of the Gestapo to Himmler on 20 April 1934 . By this time , the SA numbered over two million men .

Hitler was deeply concerned that Ernst Röhm , the chief of the SA , was planning a coup . Himmler and Reinhard Heydrich plotted with Göring to use the Gestapo and SS to crush the SA . Members of the SA got wind of the proposed action and thousands of them took to the streets in violent demonstrations on the night of 29 June 1934 . Enraged , Hitler ordered the arrest of the SA leadership . Röhm was shot dead in his cell when he refused to commit suicide ; Göring personally went over the lists of detainees ? numbering in the thousands ? and determined who else should be shot . At least 85 people were killed in the period of 30 June to 2 July , which is now known as the Night of the Long Knives . Hitler admitted in the Reichstag on 13 July that the killings had been entirely illegal , but claimed a plot had been underway to overthrow the Reich . A retroactive law was passed making the action legal . Any criticism was met with arrests .

One of the terms of the Treaty of Versailles , which had been in place since the end of World War I , stated that Germany was not allowed to maintain an air force . After the 1926 signing of the Kellogg ? Briand Pact , police aircraft were permitted . Göring was appointed Air Traffic Minister in May 1933 . Germany began to accumulate aircraft in violation of the Treaty , and in 1935 the existence of the Luftwaffe was formally acknowledged , with Göring as Reich Aviation Minister .

During a cabinet meeting in September 1936 , Göring and Hitler announced that the German rearmament programme must be sped up . On 18 October , Hitler named Göring as Plenipotentiary of the Four Year Plan to undertake this task . Göring created a new organisation to administer the Plan and drew the ministries of labour and agriculture under its umbrella . He bypassed the economics ministry in his policy @-@ making decisions , to the chagrin of Hjalmar Schacht , the minister in charge . Huge expenditures were made on rearmament , in spite of growing deficits . Schacht resigned on 8 December 1937 , and Walther Funk took over the position , as well as control of the Reichsbank . In this way , both of these institutions were brought under Göring 's control under the auspices of the Four Year Plan . In July 1937 , the Reichswerke Hermann Göring was established under state ownership ? though led by Göring ? with the aim of boosting steel production beyond the level which private enterprise could economically provide .

In 1938 , Göring was involved in the Blomberg ? Fritsch Affair , which led to the resignations of the War Minister , Field Marshal Werner von Blomberg , and the army commander , General Werner von Fritsch . Göring had acted as witness at Blomberg 's wedding to Margarethe Gruhn , a 26 @-@ year @-@ old typist , on 12 January 1938 . Information received from the police showed that the young bride was a prostitute . Göring felt obligated to tell Hitler , but also saw this event as an opportunity to dispose of the field marshal . Blomberg was forced to resign . Göring did not want Fritsch to be appointed to that position and thus be his superior . Several days later , Heydrich revealed a file on Fritsch that contained allegations of homosexual activity and blackmail . The charges were later proven to be false , but Fritsch had lost Hitler 's trust and was forced to resign . Hitler used the dismissals as an opportunity to reshuffle the leadership of the military . Göring asked for the post of War Minister , but was turned down ; he was appointed to the rank of field marshal . Hitler took over as supreme commander of the armed forces and created subordinate posts to head the three main branches of service .

As minister in charge of the Four Year Plan , Göring became concerned with the lack of natural resources in Germany , and began pushing for Austria to be incorporated into the Reich . The province of Styria had rich iron ore deposits , and the country as a whole was home to many skilled labourers that would also be useful . Hitler had always been in favour of a takeover of Austria , his native country . He met on 12 February 1938 with Austrian chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg , threatening invasion if peaceful unification was not forthcoming . The Nazi party was made legal in Austria to gain a power base , and a referendum on reunification was scheduled for March . When Hitler did not approve of the wording of the plebiscite , Göring telephoned Schuschnigg and Austrian head of state Wilhelm Miklas to demand Schuschnigg 's resignation , threatening invasion by German troops and civil unrest by the Austrian Nazi Party members . Schuschnigg resigned on 11 March and the plebiscite was cancelled . By 5 : 30 the next morning , German troops that had been massing on the border marched into Austria , meeting no resistance .

Although Joachim von Ribbentrop had been named Foreign Minister in February 1938 , Göring continued to involve himself in foreign affairs . That July , he contacted the British government with the idea that he should make an official visit to discuss Germany 's intentions for Czechoslovakia . Neville Chamberlain was in favour of a meeting , and there was talk of a pact being signed between Britain and Germany . In February 1938 , Göring visited Warsaw to quell rumours about the upcoming invasion of Poland . He had conversations with the Hungarian government that summer as well , discussing their potential role in an invasion of Czechoslovakia . At the Nuremberg Rally that September , Göring and other speakers denounced the Czechs as an inferior race that must be conquered . Chamberlain met with Hitler in a series of meetings that led to the signing of the Munich Agreement ( 29 September 1938 ) , which turned over control of the Sudetenland to Germany .

= = World War II = =

= = = Success on all fronts = = =

Göring and other senior officers were concerned that Germany was not yet ready for war , but Hitler

insisted on pushing ahead as soon as possible . The invasion of Poland , the opening action of World War II , began at dawn on 1 September 1939 . Later in the day , speaking to the Reichstag , Hitler designated Göring as his successor as Führer of all Germany , " If anything should befall me . " Big German victories followed one after the other in quick succession . With the help of the Luftwaffe , the Polish Air Force was defeated within a week . The Fallschirmjäger seized vital airfields in Norway and captured Fort Eben @-@ Emael in Belgium . Göring 's Luftwaffe played critical roles in the Battles of the Netherlands , Belgium and France in the spring , 1940 .

After the Fall of France , Hitler awarded Göring the Grand Cross of the Iron Cross for his successful leadership . During the 1940 Field Marshal Ceremony , Hitler promoted Göring to the rank of Reichsmarschall des Grossdeutschen Reiches ( Reich Marshal of the Greater German Reich ) , a special rank which made him senior to all field marshals in the military , including the Luftwaffe . As a result of his promotion , he was then the top ranking soldier of all Germany until the end of the war . Göring had already received the Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross on 30 September 1939 as Commander in Chief of the Luftwaffe .

The UK had declared war on Germany immediately after the invasion of Poland . In July 1940 , Hitler began preparations for an invasion of Britain . As part of the plan , the Royal Air Force ( RAF ) had to be neutralized . Bombing raids commenced on British air installations and on cities and centres of industry . Göring had by then already announced in a radio speech , " Wenn auch nur ein feindliches Flugzeug unser Reichsgebiet überfliegt , will ich Meier heißen ! " ( " If as much as a single enemy aircraft flies over German soil , my name is Meier ! " ) , something that would return to haunt him , when the RAF began bombing German cities on 11 May 1940 . Though he was confident the Luftwaffe could defeat the RAF within days , Göring , like Admiral Erich Raeder , commander @-@ in @-@ chief of the Kriegsmarine ( Navy ) , was pessimistic about the chance of success of the planned invasion ( codenamed Operation Sea Lion ) . Göring hoped that a victory in the air would be enough to force peace without an invasion . The campaign failed , and Sea Lion was postponed indefinitely on 17 September 1940 . After their defeat in the Battle of Britain , the Luftwaffe attempted to defeat Britain via strategic bombing . On 12 October 1940 Hitler cancelled Sea Lion due to the onset of winter . By the end of the year , it was clear that British morale was not being shaken by the Blitz , though the bombings continued through May 1941 .

= = = Decline on all fronts = = =

In spite of the Molotov ? Ribbentrop Pact , signed in 1939 , Nazi Germany began Operation Barbarossa ? the invasion of the Soviet Union ? on 22 June 1941 . Initially the Luftwaffe was at an advantage , destroying thousands of Soviet aircraft in the first month of fighting . Hitler and his top staff were sure that the campaign would be over by Christmas , and no provisions were made for reserves of men or equipment . But , by July , the Germans had only 1 @,@ 000 planes remaining in operation , and their troop losses were over 213 @,@ 000 men . The choice was made to concentrate the attack on only one part of the vast front ; efforts would be directed at capturing Moscow . After the long , but successful , Battle of Smolensk , Hitler ordered Army Group Centre to halt its advance to Moscow and temporarily diverted its Panzer groups north and south to aid in the encirclement of Leningrad and Kiev . The pause provided the Red Army with an opportunity to mobilize fresh reserves ; historian Russel Stolfi considers it to be one of the major factors that caused the failure of the Moscow offensive , which was resumed in October 1941 with the Battle of Moscow . Poor weather conditions , fuel shortages , a delay in building aircraft bases in Eastern Europe , and overstretched supply lines were also factors . Hitler did not give permission for even a partial retreat until mid @-@ January 1942 ; by this time the losses were comparable to those of the French invasion of Russia in 1812 .

Hitler decided that the summer 1942 campaign would be concentrated in the south ; efforts would be made to capture the oilfields in the Caucasus . The Battle of Stalingrad , a major turning point of the war , began on 23 August 1942 with a bombing campaign by the Luftwaffe . The Sixth Army entered the city , but because of its location on the front line , it was still possible for the Soviets to encircle and trap it there without reinforcements or supplies . When the Sixth Army was surrounded

by the end of November in Operation Uranus , Göring promised that the Luftwaffe would be able to deliver a minimum of 300 tons of supplies to the trapped men every day . On the basis of these assurances , Hitler demanded that there be no retreat ; they were to fight to the last man . Though some airlifts were able to get through , the amount of supplies delivered never exceeded 120 tons per day . The remnants of the German Sixth Army ? some 91 @, @ 000 men out of an army of 285 @, @ 000 ? surrendered in early February 1943 ; only 5 @, @ 000 of these captives survived the Russian prisoner of war camps to see Germany again .

= = = War over Germany = = =

Meanwhile , the strength of the American and British bomber fleets had increased . Based in Britain , they began operations against German targets . The first thousand @-@ bomber raid was staged on Cologne on 30 May 1942 . Air raids continued on targets further from Britain after auxiliary fuel tanks were installed on American fighter aircraft . Göring refused to believe reports that American fighters had been shot down as far east as Aachen in winter 1943 . His reputation began to decline .

The American P @-@ 51 Mustang , with a range of 1 @, @ 800 miles ( 2 @, @ 900 km ) , began to accompany the bombers in large numbers to and from the target area in early 1944 . From that point onwards , the Luftwaffe began to suffer casualties in aircrews it could not sufficiently replace . By targeting oil refineries and rail communications , Allied bombers crippled the German war effort by late 1944 . German civilians blamed Göring for his failure to protect the homeland . Hitler began excluding him from conferences , but continued him in his positions at the head of the Luftwaffe and as plenipotentiary of the Four Year Plan . As he lost Hitler 's trust , Göring began to spend more time at his various residences . On D @-@ Day ( 6 June 1944 ) , the Luftwaffe only had some 300 fighters and a small number of bombers in the area of the landings ; the Allies had a total strength of 11 @, @ 000 aircraft .

= = = End of the war = = =

As the Soviets approached Berlin , Hitler 's efforts to organize the defence of the city became ever more meaningless and futile . His last birthday , celebrated at the Führerbunker in Berlin on 20 April 1945 , was the occasion for leave @-@ taking for many top Nazis , Göring included . By this time , Carinhall had been evacuated , the building destroyed , and its art treasures moved to Berchtesgaden and elsewhere . Göring arrived at his estate at Obersalzberg on 22 April , the same day that Hitler , in a lengthy diatribe against his generals , first publicly admitted that the war was lost and that he intended to remain in Berlin to the end and then commit suicide . He also stated that Göring was in a better position to negotiate a peace settlement . In 1941 ? a week after the start of the Soviet invasion ? Hitler had issued a decree naming Göring his successor in the event of his death .

OKW operations chief Alfred Jodl was present for Hitler 's rant , and notified Göring 's chief of staff , Karl Koller , at a meeting a few hours later . Sensing its implications , Koller immediately flew to Berchtesgaden to notify Göring , who feared being accused of treason if he tried to take power . On the other hand , if he did nothing , he feared being accused of dereliction of duty . After some hesitation , Göring reviewed his copy of the 1941 decree naming him Hitler 's successor . It not only placed Göring first in the line of succession , but also stated that , if Hitler ever lost his freedom of action , Göring had complete authority to act on Hitler 's behalf as his deputy . After conferring with Koller and Hans Lammers , the state secretary of the Reich Chancellery , Göring concluded that , by remaining in Berlin to face certain death , Hitler had incapacitated himself from governing . All agreed that Göring therefore had a clear duty to take power in Hitler 's stead . He was also motivated by fears that his rival , Martin Bormann , would seize power upon Hitler 's death and would have him killed as a traitor . With this in mind , Göring sent a carefully worded telegram asking Hitler for permission to take over as the leader of Germany , stressing that he would be acting as Hitler 's deputy . He added that , if Hitler did not reply by 22 : 00 that night ( 23 April ) , he would

assume that Hitler had indeed lost his freedom of action , and would assume leadership of the Reich

The telegram was intercepted by Bormann , who convinced Hitler that Göring was a traitor and that the telegram was a demand to resign or be overthrown . Hitler sent a reply to Göring ? prepared with Bormann 's help ? informing him that , unless he resigned immediately , he would be executed for high treason . Soon afterward , Hitler removed Göring from all of his offices and ordered Göring , his staff and Lammers placed under house arrest at Obersalzberg . Bormann made an announcement over the radio that Göring had resigned for health reasons .

By 26 April , the complex at Obersalzberg was under attack by the Allies , so Göring was moved to his castle at Mauterndorf . In his last will and testament , Hitler expelled Göring from the party and formally rescinded the decree making him his successor . He then appointed Karl Dönitz , the Navy 's commander @-@ in @-@ chief , as president of the Reich and commander @-@ in @-@ chief of the armed forces . Hitler and his wife , Eva Braun , committed suicide on 30 April 1945 , a few hours after a hastily arranged wedding . Göring was freed on 5 May by a passing Luftwaffe unit , and he made his way to the American lines in hopes of surrendering to them rather than to the Russians . He was taken into custody near Radstadt on 6 May by elements of the 36th Infantry Division of the United States Army . This move likely saved Göring 's life ; Bormann had ordered him executed if Berlin had fallen .

= = Trial and death = =

Göring was flown to Camp Ashcan , a temporary prisoner @-@ of @-@ war camp housed in the Palace Hotel at Mondorf @-@ les @-@ Bains , Luxembourg . Here he was weaned off dihydrocodeine ( a mild morphine derivative ) ? he had been taking the equivalent of three or four grains ( 260 to 320 mg ) of morphine a day ? and was put on a strict diet ; he lost 60 pounds ( 27 kg ) . His IQ was tested while in custody and found to be 138 . Top Nazi officials were transferred in September to Nuremberg , which was to be the location of a series of military tribunals beginning in November .

Göring was the second @-@ highest @-@ ranking Nazi official tried at Nuremberg , behind Reich President ( former Admiral ) Karl Dönitz . The prosecution levelled an indictment of four charges , including a charge of conspiracy ; waging a war of aggression ; war crimes , including the plundering and removal to Germany of works of art and other property ; and crimes against humanity , including the disappearance of political and other opponents under the Nacht und Nebel ( Night and Fog ) decree ; the torture and ill @-@ treatment of prisoners of war ; and the murder and enslavement of civilians , including what was at the time estimated to be 5 @,@ 700 @,@ 000 Jews . Not permitted to present a lengthy statement , Göring declared himself to be " in the sense of the indictment not guilty " . The trial lasted 218 days ; the prosecution presented their case from November through March , and Göring 's defence ? the first to be presented ? lasted from 8 to 22 March . The sentences were read out on 30 September 1946 . Göring , forced to remain silent while seated in the dock , communicated his opinions about the proceedings using gestures , shaking his head , or laughing . He constantly took notes and whispered with the other defendants , and tried to control the erratic behaviour of Hess , who was seated beside him . During breaks in the proceedings , Göring tried to dominate the other defendants , and he was eventually placed in solitary confinement when he attempted to influence their testimony .

Captain Gustave Gilbert , a German @-@ speaking American intelligence officer and psychologist , interviewed Göring and the others in prison during the trial . Gilbert kept a journal , which he later published as Nuremberg Diary . Here he describes Göring on the evening of 18 April 1946 , as the trials were halted for a three @-@ day Easter recess :

Sweating in his cell in the evening , Göring was defensive and deflated and not very happy over the turn the trial was taking . He said that he had no control over the actions or the defense of the others , and that he had never been anti @-@ Semitic himself , had not believed these atrocities , and that several Jews had offered to testify on his behalf .

On several occasions over the course of the trial , the prosecution showed films of the



concentration camps and other atrocities . Everyone present , including Göring , found the contents of the films shocking ; he said that the films must have been faked . Witnesses , including Paul Koerner and Erhard Milch , tried to portray Göring as a peaceful moderate . Milch stated it had been impossible to oppose Hitler or disobey his orders ; to do so would likely have meant death for oneself and one 's family . When testifying on his own behalf , Göring emphasised his loyalty to Hitler , and claimed to know nothing about what had happened in the concentration camps , which were under Himmler 's control . He gave evasive , convoluted answers to direct questions and had plausible excuses for all his actions during the war . He used the witness stand as a venue to expound at great length on his own role in the Reich , attempting to present himself as a peacemaker and diplomat before the outbreak of the war . During cross @-@ examination , chief prosecutor Robert H. Jackson read out the minutes of a meeting that had been held shortly after Kristallnacht , a major pogrom in November 1938 . At the meeting , Göring had plotted to confiscate Jewish property in the wake of the pogrom . Later , David Maxwell @-@ Fyfe proved it was impossible for Göring not to have known about the Stalag Luft III murders ? the shooting of fifty airmen who had been recaptured after escaping from Stalag Luft III ? in time to have prevented the killings . He also presented clear evidence that Göring knew about the extermination of the Hungarian Jews .

Göring was found guilty on all four counts and was sentenced to death by hanging . The judgment stated :

There is nothing to be said in mitigation . For Göring was often , indeed almost always , the moving force , second only to his leader . He was the leading war aggressor , both as political and as military leader ; he was the director of the slave labour programme and the creator of the oppressive programme against the Jews and other races , at home and abroad . All of these crimes he has frankly admitted . On some specific cases there may be conflict of testimony , but in terms of the broad outline , his own admissions are more than sufficiently wide to be conclusive of his guilt . His guilt is unique in its enormity . The record discloses no excuses for this man .

Göring made an appeal asking to be shot as a soldier instead of hanged as a common criminal , but the court refused . Defying the sentence imposed by his captors , he committed suicide with a potassium cyanide capsule the night before he was to be hanged .

One theory as to how Göring obtained the poison holds that U.S. Army Lieutenant Jack G. Wheelis , who was stationed at the Nuremberg Trials , retrieved the capsules from their hiding place among Göring 's personal effects that had been confiscated by the Army and handed them over to the prisoner , after being bribed by Göring , who gave him his gold watch , pen , and cigarette case . In 2005 , former U.S. Army Private Herbert Lee Stivers , who served in the 1st Infantry Division 's 26th Infantry Regiment ? the honour guard for the Nuremberg Trials ? claimed he gave Göring " medicine " hidden inside a fountain pen that a German woman had asked him to smuggle into the prison . Stivers later said that he did not know what was in the pill until after Göring 's suicide .

Göring 's body , as those of the other executed men , was displayed at the execution ground for the witnesses of the executions . The bodies were cremated at Ostfriedhof ( Munich ) and the ashes were scattered in the Isar River .

= = Personal properties = =

The confiscation of Jewish property gave Göring the opportunity to amass a personal fortune . Some properties he seized himself or acquired for a nominal price . In other cases , he collected bribes for allowing others to steal Jewish property . He took kickbacks from industrialists for favourable decisions as Four Year Plan director , and money for supplying arms to the Spanish Republicans in the Spanish Civil War via Pyrkal in Greece ( although Germany was supporting Franco and the Nationalists ) .

Göring was appointed Reich Master of the Hunt in 1933 and Master of the German Forests in 1934 . He instituted reforms to the forestry laws and acted to protect endangered species . Around this time he became interested in Schorfheide Forest , where he set aside 100 @,@ 000 acres ( 400 km2 ) as a state park , which is still extant . There he built an elaborate hunting lodge , Carinhall , in

memory of his first wife , Carin . By 1934 , her body had been transported to the site and placed in a vault on the estate . The main lodge had a large art gallery where Göring displayed works that had been plundered from private collections and museums around Europe from 1939 onward . Göring worked closely with the Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg ( Reichsleiter Rosenberg Taskforce ) , an organisation tasked with the looting of artwork and cultural material from Jewish collections , libraries , and museums throughout Europe . Headed by Alfred Rosenberg , the task force set up a collection centre and headquarters in Paris . Some 26 @, @ 000 railroad cars full of art treasures , furniture , and other looted items were sent to Germany from France alone . Göring repeatedly visited the Paris headquarters to review the incoming stolen goods and to select items to be sent on a special train to Carinhall and his other homes . The estimated value of his collection ? numbering some 1 @, @ 500 pieces ? was \$ 200 million .

Göring was known for his extravagant tastes and garish clothing . He had various special uniforms made for the many posts he held ; his Reichsmarschall uniform included a jewel @-@ encrusted baton . Hans @-@ Ulrich Rudel , the top Stuka pilot of the war , recalled twice meeting Göring dressed in outlandish costumes : first , a medieval hunting costume , practicing archery with his doctor ; and second , dressed in a red toga fastened with a golden clasp , smoking an unusually large pipe . Italian Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano once noted Göring wearing a fur coat that looked like what " a high grade prostitute wears to the opera " . He threw lavish housewarming parties each time a round of construction was completed at Carinhall , and changed costumes several times throughout the evenings .

Göring was noted for his patronage of music , especially opera . He entertained frequently and sumptuously , and hosted elaborate birthday parties for himself . Armaments minister Albert Speer recalled that guests brought expensive gifts such as gold bars , Dutch cigars , and valuable artwork . For his birthday in 1944 , Speer gave Göring an oversize marble bust of Hitler . As a member of the Prussian Council of State , Speer was required to donate a considerable portion of his salary towards the Council 's birthday gift to Göring without even being asked . Field Marshal Erhard Milch told Speer that similar donations were required out of the Air Ministry 's general fund . For his birthday in 1940 , Italian Foreign Minister Count Ciano decorated Göring with the coveted Collar of Annunziata . The award reduced him to tears .

The design of the Reichsmarschall standard , on a light blue field , featured a gold German eagle grasping a wreath surmounted by two batons overlaid with a swastika . The reverse side of the flag had the Großkreuz des Eisernen Kreuzes ( " Grand Cross of the Iron Cross " ) surrounded by a wreath between four Luftwaffe eagles . The flag was carried by a personal standard @-@ bearer at all public occasions .

Though he liked to be called " der Eiserne " ( the Iron Man ) , the once dashing and muscular fighter pilot had become corpulent . He was one of the few Nazi leaders who did not take offense at hearing jokes about himself , " no matter how rude " , taking them as a sign of popularity . Germans joked about his ego , saying that he would wear an admiral 's uniform to take a bath , and his obesity , joking that " he sits down on his stomach " . One joke claimed that he had sent a wire to Hitler after his visit to the Vatican : " Mission accomplished . Pope unfrocked . Tiara and pontifical vestments are a perfect fit . "

= = Complicity in the Holocaust = =

Goebbels and Himmler were far more antisemitic than Göring , who mainly adopted that attitude because party politics required him to do so . His own deputy , Erhard Milch , had a Jewish parent . But Göring supported the Nuremberg Laws of 1935 , and later initiated economic measures unfavourable to Jews . He required the registration of all Jewish property as part of the Four Year Plan , and at a meeting held after Kristallnacht was livid that the financial burden for the Jewish losses would have to be made good by German @-@ owned insurance companies . He proposed that the Jews be fined one billion marks .

At the same meeting , options for the disposition of the Jews and their property were discussed . Jews would be segregated into ghettos or encouraged to emigrate , and their property would be

seized in a programme of Aryanization . Compensation for seized property would be low , if any was given at all . Detailed minutes of this meeting and other documents were read out at the Nuremberg trial , proving his knowledge of and complicity with the persecution of the Jews . He told Gilbert that he would never have supported the anti @-@ Jewish measures if he had known what was going to happen . " I only thought we would eliminate Jews from positions in big business and government , " he claimed .

In July 1941 , Göring issued a memo to Reinhard Heydrich ordering him to organise the practical details of a solution to the " Jewish Question " . By the time that this letter was written , many Jews and others had already been killed in Poland , Russia , and elsewhere . At the Wannsee Conference , held six months later , Heydrich formally announced that genocide of the Jews of Europe was now official Reich policy . Göring did not attend the conference , but he was present at other meetings where the number of people killed was discussed .

= = Support of anti @-@ Nazi brother = =

Göring 's younger brother Albert despised Nazism , and offered active resistance to the regime , including helping prisoners escape from concentration camps . He was arrested four times , but Hermann secured his release each time . Hermann 's daughter Edda told The Guardian that Albert " could certainly help people in need himself financially and with his personal influence , but as soon as it was necessary to involve higher authority or officials , then he had to have the support of my father , which he did get . "

= = Decorations and awards = =

German

Iron Cross

2nd Class on 15 September 1914

1st Class on 22 March 1915

Clasp to the Iron Cross

2nd Class on 30 September 1939

1st Class on 30 September 1939

Knight 's Cross of the Iron Cross on 30 September 1939

Grand Cross of the Iron Cross for " the victories of the Luftwaffe in 1940 during the French campaign " ( the only award of this decoration ? 19 July 1940 )

Golden Party Badge

Pour le Mérite ( May 1918 )

Knight of the House Order of Hohenzollern

Knight of the Military Karl @-@ Friedrich Merit Order

Blood Order ( Commemorative Medal of 9 November 1923 )

Danzig Cross , 1st and 2nd class

Foreign

Grand Cordon of the Order of the Rising Sun ( Japan )

Member First Class of the Order of Michael the Brave ( Kingdom of Romania )

Knight of the Order of St Stephen ( Kingdom of Hungary )

Commander Grand Cross of the Order of the Sword ( Kingdom of Sweden ) ( 1939 )

Knight of the Supreme Order of the Most Holy Annunciation ( Kingdom of Italy ) ( 1940 )

Knight Grand Cross of the Order of Saints Maurice and Lazarus ( Kingdom of Italy ) ( 1940 )

Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the Crown of Italy ( Kingdom of Italy ) ( 1940 )