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- 1) Hitler's revolver
- 2) Klara Hitler (mother)
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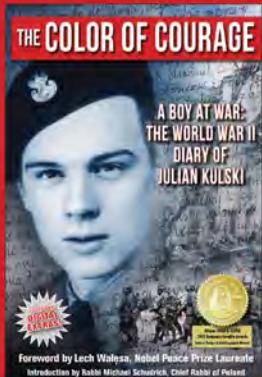
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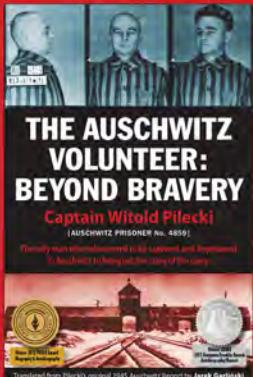
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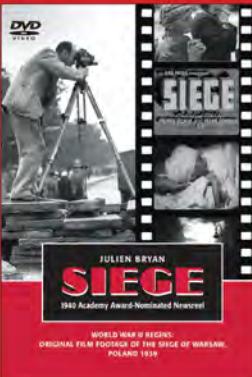
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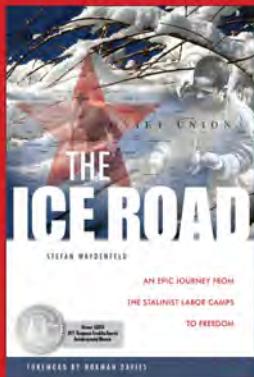


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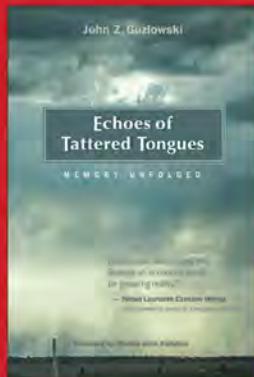
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# ADOLF HITLER

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## EDITORIAL

MICHAEL E. HASKEW

### Adolf Hitler remains the personification of evil.

**N**early three-quarters of a century distant from the end of World War II and the defeat of Nazi Germany, one may conclude with confidence that few images of mankind's violent history stir greater revulsion and, yes, lingering fear than that of a glowering Adolf Hitler—steely eyes gazing outward from a page or the glow of a computer screen.

Although other despots have come and gone—Genghis Khan, Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot—to name a few, it is Hitler who likely stands second only to Lucifer himself in the pantheon of evildoers. Even Judas Iscariot may elicit some empathy, and the Rolling Stones voiced a plea of “Sympathy for the Devil.” Unlike Lucifer, however, Hitler was born a man. The only compassionate chord that resonates for the Nazi Führer, murderer of millions, is from that far-right Fascist and Neo-Nazi corner of the political spectrum that survives today and is, in itself, enough to turn the collective stomach of the majority of the civilized world.



Historians, psychiatrists, observers, and even those who knew the Nazi dictator have endeavored to rationalize or explain the mind of the madman. Their search and exhaustive analysis will likely never achieve a consensus, but each of them has engaged in an attempt to answer the haunting question. Why?

What was it that motivated Adolf Hitler to rise to power first as the leader of the Nazi Party and then as the Führer of Germany? Was it a primal lust for power? A consuming hatred of Jewry, non-Aryans, and political opponents whatever their stripe? A redress of the harsh terms of the Treaty of Versailles and the recovery of German honor and respect among nations? Quite probably, the answer lies in a strange brew of these and other factors.

While the specter of Adolf Hitler haunts us today, still capable of disturbing our sleep or conjuring images of inhumanity so horrible that we look quickly away, the Führer fascinates.

Frankly, the idea of publishing a “special issue” centered on the life and legacy of Adolf Hitler generated substantial controversy in our editorial discussions. Herein the reader will find an informative and enlightening overview of Hitler, his warped and twisted entourage, and those who chose to do his bidding along with the havoc, mayhem, death, and destruction they unleashed upon the world. Our goal here is to inform and allow readers to draw their own conclusions as we step out and offer an issue of *WWII History* that has been under consideration for quite a while.

Perhaps our strongest motivation is to remind ourselves and others that we must never forget that men are capable of inflicting unthinkable evil and suffering upon one another—simply because others do nothing to stop it. The lesson of Hitler, his Nazi cronies, the 12 years of the Third Reich, and the upheaval that their world war spawned is quite clear. Never again.

As philosopher and author George Santayana warned: “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

It is good that Hitler and the Nazis continue to unnerve us as they do.

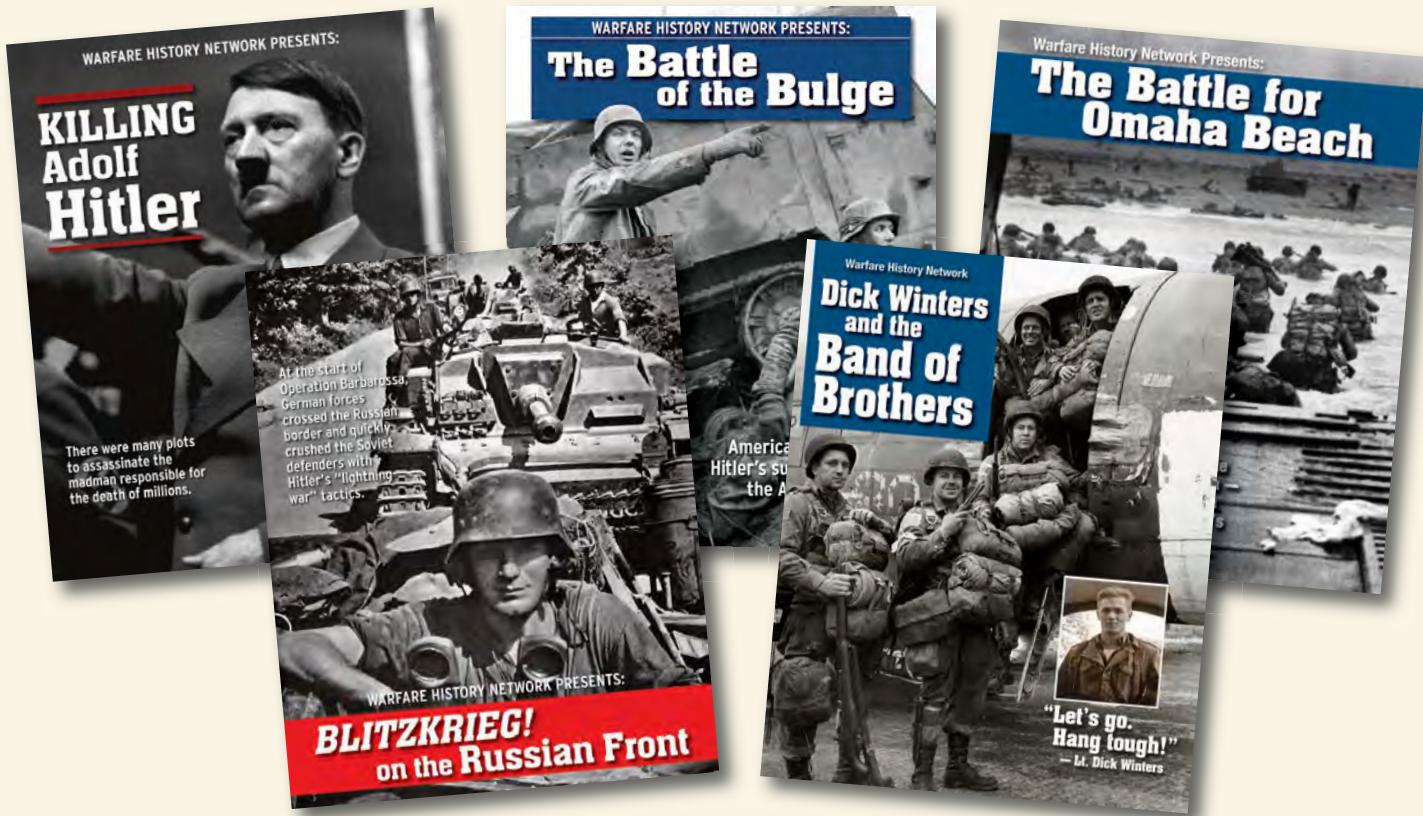
Michael E. Haskew

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**T**he fourth child of Alois and Klara Hitler is born on April 20, 1889, at the Pommer Inn in Braunau-am-Linz, Austria, across the River Danube from Germany. Adolf Hitler's father Alois, 42, is a retired customs inspector who has gained special permission to marry his niece, Klara Polzl, 25. Contrary to rumors and tales, there is no truth to Jewish ancestry, but his family, like 40 percent of those in Austria-Hungary, has a trail of illegitimacy.

Hitler's father dies when Adolf is 14. He lives with his half-sister Paula and Klara in a small apartment in Linz and studies art. But he fails his 1906 admission test for the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts and blames the Jews. And in 1907, despite the efforts of her Jewish physician, Dr. Edward Bloch, Klara Hitler dies of breast cancer, leaving Adolf prostrate with grief.

Living on his father's pension of 25 kronen a month, Hitler still refuses to work, spending his limited money on Wagner operas. He becomes obsessed by Rienzi, seeing himself as the future leader of the German people. Out of money, he moves to a cheaper room, then to a smaller room, and finally lives as a tramp. A decade later, Hitler will say he lived for years in poverty, beating carpets, shoveling snow,

He even finds time to read anti-Semitic pamphlets and develops the central core theory of his life: that the Jews, as a race,

Bundesarchiv Bild 146-1978-096-03, Photo: Unknown



BY DAVID H. LIPPMAN

# HITLER'S ROAD TO POWER

An obscure Austrian-born corporal rose to lead the Third Reich into the most devastating conflict the world has ever known.

and living in soup kitchens, while being rejected by Jewish-run Vienna art schools for shoddy work.

In actuality, Hitler only lives as a homeless person for three months. He grows a beard, loses weight, and his clothes turn filthy.

The experience gives Hitler an utter hatred for Vienna and what he perceives as the ruling capitalist and Jewish elites who seemingly allow his misery to continue. Never does he consider advancing his education, taking a job, or simply returning to Linz. He regards himself as special and above such mundane concerns.

A break from this destitution comes from Reinhold Hanisch, a fellow lodger who suggests that Adolf copy photographs and paintings of city scenes onto postcards, which Hanisch will go door to door and sell. The two will split the profits. It works.

Within weeks, Hitler loses his tattered clothing, filthy beard, and growling stomach.

are destroying the German people. To Hitler, all calamities, ranging from modern architecture to the perversion of the culture of Lapland, are the fault of the Jewish conspiracy.

Hitler roars that the Jew is the "cold-hearted, shameless, and calculating director" of prostitution, that music and art are controlled by Jews, and so is the Social Democratic press.

But by June, the Hanisch-Hitler partnership is over. Back to poverty. Before



# HITLER

Adolf Hitler glares from the dark background of this 1932 election poster. Early in the party's history, the Nazis were considered right-wing lunatics. However, the charismatic Hitler and an aggressive appeal to the people of Germany raised the Nazis to power. OPPOSITE: During the Nazi effort to win seats in Germany's parliamentary elections of 1932, young members of the SA, popularly known as Stormtroopers, tack up a poster supporting the candidacy of Adolf Hitler.

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Hitler returns to the streets, his aunt Johanna Wolf withdraws her life savings of 3,800 kronen from her bank in December and gives the bulk of it to Adolf.

Through 1911 and 1912, Hitler works hard at his art, developing a great ability to reproduce buildings and structures, but not human beings. His structures, done in pencil, oil, and watercolors, attract the attention of art dealers and the respect of others.

During this time, Hitler's hatred of the Jews and the Austro-Hungarian Empire gains weight. He devours the notorious Russian anti-Semitic forgery *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion*.

"One day, when passing through the (Vienna) Inner City," Hitler writes later in *Mein Kampf*, "I suddenly encountered a phenomenon in a long caftan and wearing black sidelocks. My first thought was: is this a Jew? They certainly did not have this appearance in Linz. I watched the man stealthily and cautiously, but the longer I gazed at this strange countenance and examined it section by section, the more the question shaped itself in my brain: is this a German? I turned to books for help in removing my doubts. For the first time in my life, I bought myself some anti-Semitic pamphlets for a few pence." Yet this theory does not stand up. His description is based on anti-Semitic pamphlets he had already seen in Linz, where he has also seen Jews.

Hitler's philosophy is based on his experiences of living in homeless shelters and hostels—that life is a struggle. "The idea of struggle is as old as life itself, for life is only preserved because other living things perish through struggle. In this struggle, the stronger, the more able win, while the less able, the weak lose. Struggle is the father of all things.... It is not by the principles of humanity that man lives or is able to preserve himself above the animal world, but solely by means of the most brutal struggle.... If you do not fight for life, then life will never be won."

These ideas are formed in the unbelievably crude environment of a homeless shelter, filled with society's failures, rejects, con-

All: Library of Congress



ABOVE: Young Adolf Hitler strikes a haughty pose in this early photo. Hitler loved his mother, Klara, tremendously, and her death from cancer devastated him. His father, Alois, was a low-level Austrian customs inspector and heavy drinker who regularly beat the young Hitler and gripped the family in fear.

BETWEEN: As a young man, Hitler failed to gain entry into an acclaimed art school in Vienna. He maintained a lifelong grudge against the establishment and intelligentsia that had denied him, so he believed, a rightful place in the academy. This example is typical of Hitler's artwork, devoid of life and without people depicted.



National Archives

men, and desperate people. It is an environment and a population recognizable in the flophouses of Munich in 1910 or the shelters of London or New York in 2016. Both are worlds awash in petty criminals, psychotic brutes, drug addicts, alcoholics, confidence men, and the mentally ill, all scheming against each other in a battle for the tiniest edge: money, clothes, drugs, sex, and sleeping arrangements.

Hitler develops a view of the world he will never drop, even at the height of his mastery of Europe. In many ways, Nazi Germany will resemble a flophouse, ruled by its inmates, a constant struggle for power and profit, a charnel house of routine horror, brutality, and murder. "Whatever goal man has reached is due to his originality plus brutality," Hitler will say later.

Hitler also develops a hatred and contempt for nearly every level of organized soci-

ety. He has no support for trade unions and workers' organizations, regarding them as a rabble. He bitterly hates the middle class, the bourgeois, and the managers and administrators of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. He hates parliamentary democracy. He believes it reduces government to political jobbery, putting a premium on mediocrity and the avoidance of responsibility in favor of party compromises. "The majority represents not only ignorance but cowardice ... the majority cannot replace the man."

Above all, Hitler hates the Jews.

"Was there any shady undertaking, any form of foulness, especially in cultural life, in which at least one Jew did not participate?" Hitler fulminates later. "On putting the probing knife carefully to that kind of abscess one immediately discovered, like a maggot in a putrescent body, a little Jew who was often blinded by the sudden light."

In Hitler's mind, his speeches, and later writings, Jews became a fantasy figure, a leering, hideous devil, seducing little German girls, flooding the world with pornography and prostitution (which Hitler says includes modern art), controlling the press, capitalism, and socialism, and preventing Hitler from advancing in life. "Thus I finally discovered who were the evil spirits leading our people astray.... My love for my own people increased correspondingly. Considering the satanic skill which these evil counsellors displayed, how could their unfortunate victims be blamed? The more I came to know the Jew, the easier it was to excuse the workers."

In 1913, Hitler moves to Munich, and writes later, "I came to love that city more than any other place known to me. A German city. How different from Vienna." He does well selling his postcards until August 1914, when the Great War breaks out. A photograph of cheering crowds at the Felderrnhalle shows Hitler among them.

Hitler enlists in the Bavarian Army and is assigned to the 16th Bavarian Reserve Infantry Regiment. For the first time in his life, he has a purpose. He is a soldier in the

great cause, fighting on the Western Front against the British, in the trenches.

Yet the ghastly conditions and horrific bloodshed of the Western Front do not faze Hitler. He finds it a liberating experience. He conducts himself with valor as a messenger under fire, earning an Iron Cross Second Class, gaining promotion to lance corporal (private first class in U.S. Army parlance), and in 1918, the Iron Cross First Class. He makes paintings of ruined villages in watercolors and actually paints a building, doing the officers' mess in a villa in bright blue.

In four years of grinding frontline combat, Hitler has a "good" war. He survives a 1916 thigh wound and major British and Canadian attacks and goes over the top in March 1918, at the Somme in the Kaiser's Battle, in Germany's last offensive, blasting open the British 3rd and 5th Armies. But the British, soon joined by American forces, stop the Germans cold in June and launch their own advance in August.

On October 14, Hitler is in the line when



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a British mustard gas shell explodes. Despite his mask, some of the gas gets into Hitler's lungs, putting him on a train to Pasewalk Military Hospital in Pomerania, eyes swollen, face puffed up, his war over.

On November 9, revolution sweeps Berlin and other cities. The kaiser is forced to abdicate, and a new government asks for an armistice.

That day, at the Pasewalk Hospital, Hitler lies still partially blinded by mustard gas poisoning, slowly recovering. A trembling elderly pastor informs the wounded soldiers that Germany has become a republic. Hitler later writes that "the pastor began to sob gently to himself—in the little hall the deepest dejection settled on all hearts, and I believe that not an eye was able to restrain its tears.

"It became impossible for me to sit still one minute more. Again everything went black before my eyes; I tottered and groped my way back to the dormitory, threw myself on my bunk, and dug my burning head into my blankets and pillow.

"Only now did I see how all personal suffering vanished in comparison with the misfortune of the Fatherland. So it had all been in vain. In vain all the sacrifices ... in vain the deaths of two million." A tearful Hitler lies in bed for days, unable to see, furious, and weeping.

Later he writes, "I knew that all was lost. Only fools, liars, and criminals could hope for mercy from the enemy. In these nights hatred grew in me, hatred for those responsible for this deed.... Miserable and degenerate criminals! The more I tried to achieve clarity on the monstrous event in this hour, the more the shame of indignation and disgrace burned my brow. What was all the pain in my eyes compared to this misery? In the days that followed, my own fate became known to me.... I resolved to become a politician."

Hitler's dream has to wait—the new government yields the German Empire and agrees to pay vast sums in reparations as it signs the Treaty of Versailles. The beaten Reich erupts into massive violence, with Communists and the right-wing Freikorps battling it out in city streets.

The new 100,000-man Reichswehr is determined to eliminate the violence. To do so in Bavaria, Captain Karl Mayr taps the recovered Lance Corporal Hitler, on the basis of his war record, and because "he was like a tired stray dog looking for a master," to investigate 50 radical organizations in the Munich area, across the political spectrum. One of them is the 54-member German Workers' Party. It has a vague program of socialism, nationalism, and anti-Semitism.

On September 12, 1919, Hitler attends a meeting of the Workers' Party in the Lieber Room of the Sterneckerbrau, a Herrenstrasse beer hall, wearing a baggy suit, to take notes for the Army. He interrupts the dull addresses with an impromptu 15-minute talk that leaves everyone stunned. "This one has what it takes, we could use him!" gasps Anton Drexler, the leader of the fledgling party.

Hitler is invited to the next meeting and joins the party as member No. 555. To make it seem more imposing, party memberships start at member No. 501. He also is named in the Executive Committee as Member No. 7.

Hitler puts his formidable energy to work to strengthen the party, dominating it with his personal leadership. No opposition, dissent, or discussion is permitted. His views and decisions are final and unalterable. He is the main organizer and speaker and electrifies audiences with angry, anti-Semitic, anti-Versailles Treaty rhetoric. He avoids the dull lectures his contemporary right-wing politicians give. He starts his speeches quietly, his hoarse voice rising in pitch, building up to an emotional climax.

The words and phrases he uses are also firm: terms like "absolute," "uncompromising," "irrevocable," "undeviating," "unalterable," and "final." He will use the same words all his life, even when ordering the last-ditch defense of Berlin.

His theses are simple: union of all Germany in a single Reich, colonies for the excess population, revocation of Versailles, ruthless war on crime, abolition of all income unearned by work. He also demands that Jews be treated as aliens, denied public office, and expelled immediately if they entered the country after August 2, 1914. In addition, Jews cannot hold or publish German-language newspapers.

Hitler's political dogma does not offer concrete economic or political policies. He just says that a nation of pure German blood will solve all problems. He does not get too specific on how that will be accomplished.

Soon Hitler has scores of converts and allies. And Hitler changes the name of his outfit to the National Socialist German Workers Party, rendered in German as the *Nazional Sozialistische Deutsches Arbeiters Partei*, or "Nazis," for short.

By 1920, strutting Nazis are marching in Munich's streets, brandishing swastika banners, howling against Versailles. But their rhetoric is buried in the chaos in Berlin, where a tougher force, the Freikorps, tries to overthrow the government. The coup fails, but it adds to the violence and tension.

Hitler moves the Nazi Party out of the beer halls and into ballot boxes and salons. His rhetorical ability is enormous. He believes that the greater the lie the more easily it

National Archives



In this photograph from World War I, Adolf Hitler stands at right with two comrades who have endured combat on the Western Front. Hitler was decorated with the Iron Cross Second Class for bravery as a messenger.

will be believed, so he invents the “big lie”—the *grossenluge*—as a tool and attributes it to the Jews. He paints his terms in simple manner: black and white, good and evil, never hesitating, never qualifying, and never backpedaling.

In a theory that anticipates the television advertising campaigns of the last quarter of the 20th century, Hitler says, “The receptive powers of the masses are very restricted, and their understanding is feeble. On the other hand, they quickly forget. Such being the case, all effective propaganda must be confined to a few bare necessities and then must be expressed in a few stereotypical formulas.”

He scorns intellectuals who want to bring in new ideas: “Only constant repetition will finally succeed in imprinting an idea on the memory of a crowd.”

Hitler soon gains more adherents, even left-wingers disaffected by the new Soviet Union. Another joiner is former army Captain Ernst Röhm, who brings in armed men from his own Army-backed Freikorps to serve as the SA, the Nazis’ strong-arm force to protect meetings and disrupt the opposition with ferocious brawls. Other future prominent Nazis join up, including the ponderous Baltic German Alfried Rosenberg, author of the incomprehensible *Myth of the 20th Century*, which blames the Jews for Germany’s sufferings, Great War flying ace Hermann Göring, sexually obsessed anti-Semite Julius Streicher, beetle-browed Rudolph Hess, who will act as Hitler’s secretary, the pince-nezed chicken farmer, mystic, and clerk Heinrich Himmler, and most notably Col. Gen. Erich von Ludendorff, one of the most lustrous figures of Germany’s Great War efforts.

In 1923, unemployment, chaos, and violence stalk Germany. When the government defaults on Versailles reparations payments, French troops occupy the Ruhr, seizing the Reich’s industrial heartland. Chancellor Wilhelm Cuno, unable to resist with force, calls for passive resistance, and factory workers and miners lay down their tools. The Reich goes on printing money, and massive inflation ensues. By June, a



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loaf of bread costs half a million marks, and workers are hauling home their pay in wheelbarrows that are more valuable than the Reichmarks in them.

That September, Bavarian state Commissar General Gustav von Kahr, Army General Otto Von Lossow, and State Police Chief Colonel Hans Von Seisser form a temporary triumvirate to run Bavaria, defying both the Nazis and the left-leaning Berlin government. They like Hitler's values, but not his tactics, and want to channel him or outlaw him. Bavaria is teetering on the edge of revolt and secession. The political crisis energizes Hitler. He decides to force Lossow and Kahr to march on Berlin in a Nazi-led coup to overthrow the Weimar Republic.

On November 6, a loaf of bread in Berlin fetches 140 billion marks. In Munich, the triumvirate meets with Hitler and his rivals. The Bavarian rulers will support a nationalist regime installed by backstairs coup to replace the leftist Chancellor Gustav Stresemann.

Kahr will hold a "mass patriotic demonstration" at Munich's Bürgerbräukeller on the evening of November 8, to announce his program and unite Bavaria's power brokers. Even Hitler is invited. But Hitler suspects a trap. Kahr may actually be moving to arrest him.

He orders the coup for 8 PM on November 8, with Göring leading the Brownshirts. "The hour has come," Hitler tells his cronies. "Tonight we act!"

Munich's largest beerhall, the Bürgerbräukeller, is packed. Beer is selling for 5 billion marks a stein.

Hitler, Hess, and Nazi publisher Max Amann, trailing armed Brownshirts, push through the crowds into the main hall while Kahr is speaking. Hitler leaps onto a chair and fires a shot into the ceiling. Sweating and pale, looking like "a cross between Charlie Chaplin and a headwaiter," Hitler tells everyone not to leave the hall and shouts, "The national revolution has broken out! The hall is surrounded!"

People in the audience shout, "Bravo!" Others yell, "South America! Mexico! Cheap comedy!"

After that, the coup turns into a disaster. Röhm's bullyboys fail to take over the telephone switchboards. Lossow, Kahr, and Seisser promise to support Hitler. But when Ludendorff shows up late to back the coup, Hitler takes advantage of the general's presence to go into the field. Lossow and his cronies take advantage of the general's credulity, and he lets them leave the beerhall. Lossow and company promptly deploy Bavaria's troops and police officers to put down the coup. They quickly round up Röhm's men.

Hitler returns to the Bürgerbräukeller, and he and Ludendorff realize they have been double crossed. Ludendorff makes the decision: "We'll march!" It's fight or surrender now. Hitler agrees with Ludendorff and adopts the idea as his own.

Some 2,000 Nazis, Hitler at their head in a trench coat and slouch hat, march on the legendary Felderrnhalle in the Odeonplatz and face Bavarian cops. One ragged police volley is all it takes to drop Hitler to the ground with a bullet wound and take Ludendorff into custody.

Hitler flees to the villa of his friend, Hans Hanfstaengl, and is arrested there two days later. The cops take Hitler to Landsberg Prison's cell seven, aching from his wounds, the coup a failure. But he learns one vital lesson: not to repeat the fiasco. He will achieve his dream of supreme power through safer and legal means.

To do that, Hitler turns his treason trial into a media event. It commences in Munich on February 26, 1924. The prosecutor, judge, and jury are all highly sympathetic to Hitler and treat him with extreme deference. The prosecutor calls Hitler "a soldier who did his duty to the utmost and could not be accused of using his position for self-interest."

Hitler uses the trial to attack the Bavarian triumvirate, the Weimar Republic, and the Treaty of Versailles, coming off as a heroic leader. His oratory and defiance make him a national figure.

Ludendorff is acquitted, and Hitler draws a five-year sentence with the possibility of parole in only a few months. Hitler is incarcerated at Landsberg Prison in a large room with a view of the countryside and given unlimited visiting rights. Guards and staff members treat him deferentially, and Rudolf Hess is there to serve as his secretary.

Hitler decides to lash back at his many enemies, doing so with a memoir titled *My*

Bundesarchiv Bild 183-S71581, Photo: Unknown



During the abortive 1923 Munich Beer Hall Putsch, future SS leader Heinrich Himmler stands with early comrades in the Nazi Party. The bid for power was crushed, and Hitler was sentenced to prison. This image also depicts Ernst Röhm, the brutal leader of the SA who was eventually murdered during the bloody purge of 1934 that came to be known as the Night of the Long Knives.



Wearing the uniform of the SA along with his Iron Cross Second Class and the Wound Badge he earned during World War I, Hitler strikes a pose for a gathering crowd before delivering a speech. The SA grew to outnumber the post-World War I German Army and was eventually seen as a threat by the German military establishment. Hitler was ultimately compelled to bring the Stormtroopers to heel through a bloody purge.

*Four-and-a-Half Years' Struggle Against Lies, Stupidity, and Cowardice: A Reckoning.* Hess bangs out Hitler's dictation on the warden's Remington typewriter. Hitler's publisher, Max Amann, suggests that such a title will be a hard sell. How about cutting the title back to that snappy line at the top of the book: *Mein Kampf?* Done.

On December 19, 1924, the Bavarian Supreme Court orders Hitler's release. Like many men who endure a term in prison, he comes out spiritually hardened, declaring his months in jail to be critical to his development.

Hitler soon resumes his leadership role, but the Nazi Party is in the doldrums. Weimar negotiates treaties to end the French occupation of the Ruhr, stabilize its finances, and even gain American and British loans to pay its reparations debt. By the mid-1920s, Germany is enjoying prosperity, and the Nazis are irrelevant.

The irrelevance ends on October 29, 1929, with the Wall Street stock market crash, which spirals the globe into the Great Depression. By 1930, the world's longest breadline shuffles down the Kurfürstendamm in Berlin. Millions of Germans are unemployed and desperate. Many join violent political parties, including the Nazis. Suddenly Hitler's denunciations of Jews and Communists, blaming them for the Reich's troubles, are extremely relevant and popular. Nazi and Communist bullies stage violent street brawls, and the government is unable to cope with the crisis.

The government puts the issues to the people with the biggest election in Reichstag history on September 14, 1930. A staggering 4.5 million newly registered voters cast ballots, and the Nazis go from 12 Reichstag seats to 107. The legislature deadlocked, Social Democrat Chancellor Heinrich Breuning rules by decree, cutting salaries, freezing wages, and reducing unemployment compensation to balance the budget. Angry Germans hurl rocks at his passing train.

Hitler is now seen by millions as Germany's savior. They ignore his blusterous rhetoric about slaughtering Jews and listen to his slogan, "For Freedom and Bread."

On October 10, 1931, Hitler meets Reich President Paul von Hindenburg and the politically ambitious General Kurt Von Schleicher, head of the German Army's political department. Hindenburg is not awed by Hitler. The Reich president suggests that Hitler back Bruening in return for a share of power.

Hitler refuses. He wants it all. After the meeting, Hindenburg tells Schleicher, "Queer fish you brought me there, general. Wants to be Chancellor, that Bohemian corporal, does he? Not if I have any say about it. Put him in charge of the Post Office. That's the best job he'll ever get." Hindenburg adds that Hitler can then lick the backside of stamps with his face on them.

Disgusted, Hitler runs for president against Hindenburg in 1932. In the March 13 election, Hindenburg wins 18.6 million votes to Hitler's 11.3 million, (49 percent to 30 percent), but a run-off is necessary. The Communists gain about five million votes. Hitler takes the results stoically, snarling, "The first election is over, the second begins today. I will also lead this one personally!"

Sure enough, on Sunday, April 10, 1932, Germany's voters trudge to the polls again.

Hitler gets two million more votes, raising him to 13.4 million, 36.8 percent of the vote. Hindenburg wins 700,000 more votes than before, a total of 19.3 million votes, but that gives him a 53 percent majority and two more years.

Schleicher makes a deal with Hitler. He will end the ban on Hitler's new paramilitary force, the SS, and his old one, the SA, if Hitler promises not to attack a new government without Bruening. Hitler needs his private armies more than he needs to flay Bruening, so he agrees.

Then Schleicher suggests a new chancellor—the polished diplomat, jockey, and part-time spy, Franz von Papen, who gasps, "I very much doubt if I am the right man." But Hitler, ever manipulative, deceitful, and self-serving, again withholds a vote of confidence. Papen is forced to call for elections.

The German voters make the wearying trek to the polls on July 30. The Nazis gain 13.7 million votes, 37.3 percent of the poll, half a million more than the combined tallies of their closest rivals, the Social Democrats and Communists. The Communists gain 12 deputies in the Reichstag, moving them up to 89 seats, while the Social Democrats lose 10, falling to 133 seats. The People's Party, the Nationalists, and the Center Party take beatings. The Nazis double their Reichstag seating from 107 seats to 230, making them the biggest bloc in the parliament. The Nazis are now a rainbow coalition of discontented, with workers, middle class, and the wealthy all supporting Hitler.

Flushed with electoral success, Hitler suggests that he should be chancellor and issues that demand to Schleicher, who says that Hindenburg is unlikely to confer the mantle of Bismarck on a lance corporal. Schleicher and von Papen meet with Hindenburg, who points out that Hitler has no government experience and cannot even control his own party's hotheads and bullyboys. All Schleicher and von Papen can offer Hitler is the vice-chancellorship.

The political stalemate means that new elections will roll in November. Papen will continue as chancellor by presidential decree.

On Sunday, November 6, the exhausted German voters troop to the polls, and the Nazis lose two million votes. They also lose 34 Reichstag seats, dropping from 230 to 196. The Communists jump from 89 seats to an even 100, and the Social Democrats fall from 133 to 121. The defeat is devastating to the Nazis. Hitler's invincibility myth is shattered. The Nazis are broken. But von Papen still has to rule by coalition, and he has to negotiate to create one. By November 17, negotiations are stalemated. Von Papen is stuck. He sends his resignation to Hindenburg.

On November 19, Hitler and Hindenburg convene again. Hitler demands the chancellor's position and an enabling act that will allow him to rule without reference to legislature or judiciary.

No, that will not pass Hindenburg's muster. Only the president can sign off such decrees. The stalemate continues. Thirty-nine industrialists sign a letter petitioning Hindenburg to appoint Hitler as chancellor, as the only man who can save capitalism.

Instead, Hindenburg summons von Papen and Schleicher, now Minister of Defense, on December 1. The situation is deadlocked. The Reichstag has to be suspended, which is a breach of the Weimar Constitution. If the police cannot keep order, the Army will have to do so. However, the SA has six times the men under arms that the Reichswehr has. And many of the Reichswehr's men openly sympathize with the Nazis.

"You can do a lot with bayonets," Schleicher observes. "But one thing you cannot do—sit on them for a long time." He has one idea, though: put himself in as chancellor, making him the first serving general to hold that office since 1890. That would split the Nazis in two, guarantee Reichstag support, and restore order.

That is what Hindenburg does. Germany gets its third Reich chancellor in a year on December 2, 1932, when Schleicher accepts the summons to form a government. Schleicher's first move after taking the oath is to offer Nazi bigshot Greigor Strasser the job of vice-chancellor and minister-president of Prussia. Strasser is somewhat loyal to Hitler and tells Schleicher that he must check with Hitler first.

When von Papen learns of the Strasser-Schleicher negotiations, he passes this news on to Hitler. In a disintegrating Weimar Republic, the double-cross is the order of the day. Hitler, of course, the master of betrayal, is angry when someone betrays him. When Schleicher offers Hitler the vice-chancellorship on December 5, Strasser begs Hitler to accept it. Hitler accuses him of treason. "You have stabbed me in the back! You don't want me to become chancellor! You want to push me out of the party leadership and put me on the sidelines!"

On December 8, Strasser resigns his party offices, saying Hitler no longer trusts him. He urges all party officials to stay on the job. Hitler denounces Strasser as a traitor. Hitler fires all of Strasser's followers and cronies, denouncing Strasser's treachery to his party leaders personally, and they all spontaneously give the Führer an ovation. But

National Archives



Hitler stands at center with some of the chief conspirators of the failed 1923 Munich Beer Hall Putsch. At left is Field Marshal Erich Ludendorff, whose post-World War I prestige was counted on to legitimize the bid for power; Wilhelm Brückner, Hitler's chief adjutant until 1940; and SA leader Ernst Röhm, who paid for his ambitions with his life in 1934.

Hitler is left despairing and distressed, convinced he will never gain full power.

Hitler is wrong. Germany's situation is changing daily, even hourly. Hitler wants to gain power. Von Papen wants to get rid of Schleicher. Hindenburg and von Papen both believe the Nazi menace can be tamed by bringing Hitler and his crew into government. Ironically, if the Nazi Party does collapse it will be the end of von Papen's authoritarian dreams, a recovery for democratic parties and parliamentary government. Big business is worried by Schleicher's economic programs. "We will hire Hitler for our Reich chancellor," von Papen tells his cronies.

Papen and Hitler meet on January 4, 1933. Papen suggests that Schleicher could be replaced by a two-man tandem of Hitler and von Papen with both equal. Hitler says he must be appointed chancellor and actual head of government. Papen must agree to his policy of eliminating Social Democrats, Communists, and Jews from the Reich's leading positions. The two agree.

Schleicher's position is almost untenable. Everybody, left and right, hates his guts. Papen takes Hindenburg and the elderly president's son Oskar for a walk through the Reichskanzlei's snow-covered gardens and suggests that Hitler be made chancellor—as long as the policies are dictated by von Papen. Hitler, being a coarse ex-corporal, is a good speaker and a popular fellow, but he is no aristocrat and certainly incapable of being head of government. But he could be a good puppet for a military-nationalist dominated regime.

Hindenburg is not sure. But he agrees to send Oskar and von Papen to meet with Hitler secretly on January 22. At the parley, Hitler tells Oskar that only he can save Germany from the Communists. Hitler must be chancellor. An election must be followed by an enabling act to give Hitler supreme power. After that, Oskar heads back to his father believing that Hitler has to be taken into the government.

Meanwhile, von Papen swears allegiance to Hitler and promises to support him for chancellor. Under no circumstances will von Papen take the job himself.

Schleicher finds out about the secret meeting and proposes a military dictatorship to Hindenburg. The Reichstag will be dissolved, elections suspended, the Reichswehr to take over all affairs. Hindenburg is against that idea. He believes in the Army, but he does not believe in Schleicher.

When Schleicher's plan leaks out, the Social Democrats and Center parties blast him as an enemy of the people and the constitution, calling his plan treason. Schleicher says that he has no intention of violating the constitution. The Nationalists and their leader Alfred Hugenberg promptly abandon Schleicher as double-crosses and Machiavellian tactics reach new lows.

On January 28, von Papen tells Hindenburg that the only solution is a Hitler chancellery. By now, the aging and increasingly senile Hindenburg has been flooded with

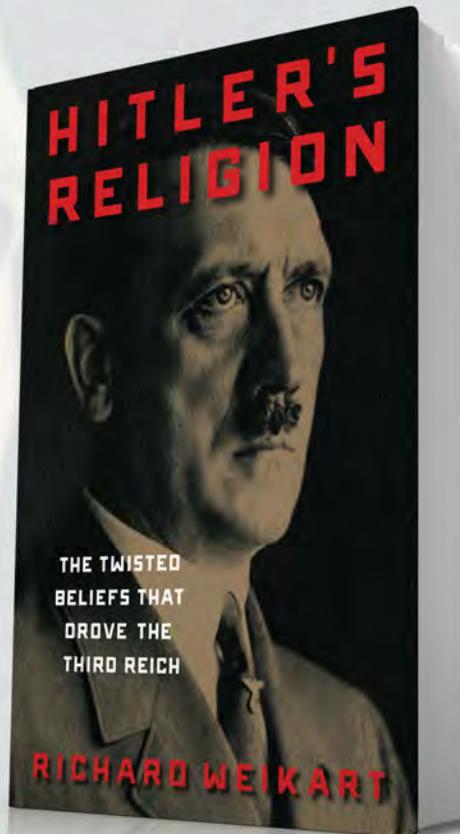
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telegrams and letters begging him to appoint Hitler as chancellor. Although Hindenburl still regards Hitler as that “Bohemian corporal,” he is now moving toward the appointment.

Simultaneously, the embattled Schleicher is meeting with his cabinet. His latest plan is to ask Hindenburl to dissolve the Reichstag. If Hindenburl refuses, Schleicher will resign. The chancellor adjourns the meeting to see the president. It is a short chat. Hindenburl gives Schleicher’s request for dissolution of the Reichstag a one-word answer: “Nein!”

Hindenburl grumbles, “It is my unpleas-

ABOVE: During Adolf Hitler's failed run for president during the elections of March 1932, Berliners take to the streets to show their support for the Nazi candidate. Although Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburl defeated Hitler in the election the Nazis continued to emerge as a political, social, and militaristic force in Germany and Europe. LEFT: A devious Adolf Hitler bows before Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburl, the German Army hero of World War I who was elected president of the country during the turbulent postwar years. Hitler brokered a deal to become chancellor of Germany under Hindenburl.

ant duty then to appoint this fellow Hitler as chancellor?” Hindenburl then insists that General Werner Von Blomberg, a nonpolitical and aristocratic soldier, be appointed minister of defense and von Papen as vice-chancellor and head of Prussia.

On Sunday, January 29, von Papen brings the decision to Hitler. It takes von Papen’s persuasive powers all morning to convince Hitler to accept the agreement. He agrees with Hitler’s demand that these be the last elections. Papen reports all this to Hindenburl, and the president agrees.

Instead, on the morning of Monday, January 30, Hitler, and Hugenberg walk over to Hindenburl’s office along with other cabinet hopefuls.

Hindenburl does not offer the chancellery to Hitler or even give the new cabinet a welcoming speech. Hitler simply puts up his right hand and swears to observe the Weimar Constitution as Reichskanzler. Elections will be held on March 5.

After that, Hitler makes a speech promising to find a majority in parliament so as to end emergency decrees, solve the economic crisis, and unite Germany. Then he waits for Hindenburl to respond. All the field marshal says is, “And now, gentlemen, forward with God!”

Adolf Hitler, age 43, an Austrian high school dropout, a former tramp, carpet beater, lance corporal, failed artist, and convicted traitor now stands as chancellor of the German Reich, in the office of Bismarck, the most powerful man in Europe’s greatest industrial state, ready to impose his violence, anti-Semitism, and tyranny on Ger-

many, Europe, and the world.

At his hotel, Hitler shouts, "We've done it!" to the party faithful and accepts congratulations from the party big shots and the hotel maids and servants.

At 5 PM on January 30, Hitler's cabinet meets for the first time. Papen sits at Hitler's right hand as vice-chancellor and minister of Prussia. Göring is minister without portfolio.

After that, everyone retires to celebrate the victory. Most of the celebrating is done by the Brownshirts. After years of living in poverty, marching in step, street brawling, rallies, and jail terms, they have suddenly gained almost unlimited power at the stroke of a pen. Most learn only through newspapers that they have to march in a torchlight parade through Berlin that evening.



Former General Kurt von Sleicher, left, and career diplomat Franz von Papen conspired to contain Hitler by having him named chancellor of Germany. Their gambit failed and facilitated the rise of the Nazis to power in the country.

Brownshirts are surprised to see former enemies now wearing swastika pins. Joined by the Nationalists' stahlhelm men, the Nazis march behind brass bands through the Brandenburg Gate, singing the "Horst Wessel Lied." They head for the Reich Chancellery,

where Hitler leans out a window, reviewing his followers. The crowds howl, "Heil, heil, sieg heil!" Hitler laughs, cries, and bows to his supporters.

A writer on the scene notes, "He had never looked so happy since 8th November, 1923, in the Burgerbraukeller in Munich. His bearing was one laugh of triumph, the upper part of his body jerked backwards and forwards as he bowed."

But as the Brownshirts march, launching a new era, some of Hitler's alleged allies hold him in contempt. Surveying the scene, von Papen tells his pals, "What do you want? I have Hindenburg's confidence. Within two months we will have pushed Hitler so far in the corner that he'll squeak."

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*David H. Lippman is a longtime contributor to World War II History magazine. This article is adapted from his e-book, World War II Plus 75—The Road to War, which is available on both SmashWords and Amazon.*

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# HITLER'S SPEECHES

BY JOHN PERRY

## Adolf Hitler was a master of oratory, mesmerizing crowds with words and gestures.

**W**hen Nazi architect Albert Speer surrendered in 1945, he made a strange remark: "So now the end has come. That's good. It was all only a kind of opera anyway."

Minister for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda Josef Goebbels agreed that Hitler turned politics into a grand play. Even the Führer called himself "the greatest actor in Europe," enjoying contact with movie stars while plunging the world into a melodrama of madness. Through years of political propaganda, theatrical trappings, and charismatic speaking, this vagrant beer hall agitator became what biographer Alan Bullock called "the greatest demagogue in history."

During his rise to power, Hitler warned that the German people "must not be allowed to find out who I am. They must not know where I came from and who my family is."

The blurred youth of Adolf Hitler set the stage for his meteoric rise to power after World War I. Clara, his indulgent mother who died of cancer, called her thin, pale-faced, irascible boy "moonstruck" because he lived in a dream world.

Childhood friend August Kubizek later wrote that Adolf showed "a gift for oratory from his earliest youth. And he knew it. He liked to talk, and talked without pause. Sometimes when he soared too high in his fantasies I could not help suspecting that all this was nothing but an exercise in oratory."

A teacher in Linz also remembered "Hitler holding duologues with trees stirring in the wind." And in his book *Mein Kampf*, jailbird Hitler reminisced that his "oratorical talent was being developed in the form of more or less violent arguments with my schoolmates."

Hitler drifted to Vienna, selling watercolors and painted postcards on the street



Adolf Hitler stands before a massive crowd and prepares to deliver a rousing speech during a rally in Dortmund, Germany, in July 1933. Hitler honed his oratory skills and captivated audiences across Germany during his rise to power and early in the 12-year duration of the Third Reich.

after twice failing the entrance exam to the Academy of Fine Arts—a slight that left unhealed scar tissue.

It is probable that Hitler stayed in Vienna to avoid the draft, returning to Munich when conditions seemed safe, but the Army summoned him for an examination. Military doctors found the future Army commander “not strong enough for combatant and non-combatant duties” and rejected him as “unfit for military service.” Nevertheless, he managed to join the Bavarian Army and served as a regimental dispatch runner. Before the end of World War I, Hitler had been gassed and injured. He recovered in a hospital where the psychiatric department labeled him a psychopath with hysterical symptoms. He did receive the Iron Cross twice but never rose above corporal (actually private) because superiors felt this oddball lacked leadership qualities, “posture was lazy,” and “talked, scolded, derided and distorted the true state of affairs with a certain cunning deftness,” as one medic put it.

Germany became an economic wasteland after World War I. Strikes, disorder, and the black market plagued the crippled country because of the Versailles Treaty’s so-called “stab in the back.” Out of this rubble rose magicians and messiahs, but the National Workers Party hit the jackpot with Hitler, who lashed out at communists, capitalists, intellectuals, trusts and monopolies, the French, Polish and Jews, anything to create mass frenzy through fear.

After the war, Hitler returned to Munich and became involved in the Bavarian Soviet Republic. He remained in the Army and did guard duty at a POW camp and train station. The Information Department offered “speaker courses” as training tools for troops. An instructor recalled, “The men seemed spellbound by one of their number who was haranguing them with mounting passion in a strangely guttural voice. I had the peculiar feeling that their excitement derived from him and at the same time they, in turn, were inspiring him.”

Officer Karl Mayr heard about Hitler’s oratorical skills and enlisted him as an undercover agent. “He was like a tired stray dog looking for a master” and “ready to throw in his lot with anyone who should



**Hitler harangues a gathering at the opening of the Winter Relief Organization in the Berlin Sports Palace in 1936. At the time this photo was taken, Hitler was preparing to plunge Europe into war for the second time in the 20th century.**

show him kindness.”

Mayr later wrote, “He was totally unconcerned about the German people and their destinies.” The beer hall stumper spoke on topics such as “Social and Economic-Political Slogans.” Some soldiers found his talks “spirited,” one calling him “a born popular speaker.” As Hitler exclaimed in *Mein Kampf*, “I could speak.”

Mayr also used Hitler as a stooge to attend meetings of radical political parties in Munich. One group was called the DAP (German Workers Party, later changed to National Socialist German Workers Party, shortened to Nazi). Instead of observing, he shouted down a guest speaker who gained attention, leading the party’s founder to remark, “He has a big mouth. We could use him.”

Hitler joined the splinter group in 1919 and soon handled party propaganda, seeing himself as a drummer for the great revolution yet rapidly becoming the outspoken party voice. In 1920, for example, he roused crowds at more than 30 mass meetings, the next year spoke to more than

6,000 members at Munich’s largest hall, and in 1922 an audience of 50,000 at a Nazi rally in Munich. Hitler may have been obscure in most of Germany, but not among diehard Nazis whose number soon reached 55,000. As businessman Kurt G.W. Ludecke recalled, “His words were like a scourge. When he spoke of the disgrace of Germany, I felt ready to spring on any enemy.”

Hypnotist, clairvoyant, and stage magician Erik Jan Hanussen is often overlooked as an influence on Hitler’s speaking style. Former Nazi ranking member Otto Strasser told a psychoanalyst in 1942, “Hitler took regular lessons in speaking and in mass psychology from a man named Hanussen, who was also a practicing astrologer and fortune-teller. He was an extremely clever individual who taught Hitler a great deal concerning the importance of staging meetings to obtain the greatest dramatic effect.” The Führer learned crowd control through gestures and the use of garish poses from Hanussen, who was later murdered by Nazis.

Many people commented on Hitler’s Medusa eyes, which he used to stare down others. One Nazi minister later wrote, “I had an opportunity to study his face carefully.... I tried to find some explanation for the hypnotic effect of those eyes without arriving at any explanation.” Hitler’s childhood friend August Kubizek recalled, “The eyes were so outstanding that one didn’t notice anything else. Never in my life have I seen any other person whose appearance—how shall I put it—was so completely dominated by the eyes.”

Many saviors preached to Germans after World War I in order to gain political power. Papers often reported street fights, plots, and putsches to overthrow the government. On November 8, 1923, several thousand people packed a large Munich beer hall to hear the prime minister of Bavaria speak. Suddenly, the doors flew open and Hitler, flanked by storm troopers, entered with a holstered Browning revolver. He leaped on a beer table, fired a shot into the ceiling, and took the politicians hostage. A heated oration ensued. The shaking, sweating Hitler screamed, causing beer drinkers to applaud: “Hock!

Hock! Hock! Heil Hitler!"

The ill-conceived putsch petered out by morning. When the smoke cleared, more than a dozen Nazis had been killed or wounded. Hitler fled in a yellow Opel and hid in a rich supporter's attic, threatening to commit suicide.

The publicized Munich trial of conspirators turned into a travesty as Hitler dominated the courtroom, speaking for hours in a trance about the Versailles Treaty and the betrayal of the Fatherland. "You may pronounce us guilty a thousand times over, but the goddess of the eternal court of history will smile and tear to tatters the brief of the State Prosecutor and the sentence of this court. For she acquits us."

When Hitler received a short prison sentence instead of being deported, crowds cheered both inside and outside the courtroom. Newspaper reporters featured the dramatic beer hall putsch, introducing a new German political figure to the world.

After Hitler left prison, his movement lost leverage, but he continued to make public speeches, appealing mainly to farmers and workers who sought simple answers to complex problems through the Nazi Party. But through backstage political intrigue, Hitler convinced President Hindenberg to appoint him chancellor in 1933.

Ascetic Hitler understood the power of place and theatrics in influencing the masses. "My surroundings must look magnificent. Then my simplicity makes a striking effect." He dressed simply, ate simply, and lived simply—but made Nazi displays grandiose. Albert Speer thought that all the esoteric rituals were "almost like rites of the founding of a church."

Hitler and Goebbels supplied the German masses with endless parades, rallies, and festivals such as the staged 1936 Olympics, annual Octoberfest in Munich, and the extravagant Nuremberg Rally. Openings usually included thousands of solemn Nazi soldiers doing the macabre goosestep. Drums rolled and trumpets blasted. A male chorus chanted heroic anthems. The electric atmosphere included everything from floats and colorful costumes to banners, flags, and enormous eagles. Smoke and torchlight parades trailed on for hours, often after sundown



In these images taken by Heinrich Hoffmann, Hitler gestures wildly as he practices to perfect the art of mass persuasion. Although he believed such gestures would complement his oratory, these still photos have been the subject of derision. Hitler wanted the photographs destroyed but Hoffmann later published them in his memoir, *Hitler Was My Friend*.

for a quasi-mystical effect.

The operatic spectacles of Richard Wagner served as a blueprint for Hitler's rhetoric with their war, struggle, and mythological themes. Hitler attended productions of Wagner's operas whenever possible and patterned the hypnotic tones of speeches after them. The Nazi press pointed out, "The whole fabric of leitmotifs, of musical embellishments, contrapuntal melodies and contrasts, was precisely reflected in the layout of his speeches; they were constructed like symphonies and culminated in an immense outburst like the sound of Wagnerian trombones." Music accompanied Hitler's speeches, often his favorites the *Badenweiler* by Georg Fürst and Beethoven's Third Symphony, the *Eroica*.

Goebbels also enlisted radio and movies in the struggle. One poster praised, "All Germany listens to the Führer with the People's Radio." By 1934, more than six million radios existed in Germany, and during the war over 70 percent of homes had one, more than any other country. Loudspeakers were placed in schools, factories, and public squares. In 1933 alone, Hitler delivered 50 radio speeches but felt uncomfortable in a studio without a visual mass audience and seldom used the

medium after 1933.

More than 500 trains hauled a quarter of a million people to the 1934 Nazi Party rally in Nuremberg. Banners stretched from house to house. Festivities started, of course, with patriotic Wagnerian music. When Hitler rose to speak, Rudolf Hess shouted, "The Party is Hitler! But Hitler is Germany, just as Germany is Hitler! Hitler! Hail, Victory!" Spectators cheered.

At the legendary 1936 rally, Albert Speer created a shimmering theatrical extravaganza composed of 130 antiaircraft searchlights placed at 40-foot intervals that gave the illusion of enormous surrealistic pillars. The British ambassador remarked, "The effect, which was both solemn and beautiful, was like being in a cathedral of ice."

Hitler wrote his own speeches, sometimes waiting until the last minute, and dictated to secretaries while planning melodramatic gestures. He once told a journalist, "When I compose a speech, I visualize the people. I can see them just as though they were standing before me. I sense how they will react to this or that statement, to this or that formulation."

Speeches were often staged at night with controlled lighting effects in large auditoriums. He was probably influenced by noted German playwright Hanns Johst, who said,



"Lighting changed forms, heightened them, dissolved them and turned them into fairy tale magic." Entrances were carefully staged with delays, and Hitler usually left immediately after speaking, accompanied by stirring music.

Before speaking, Hitler became jittery, fingering cap and gloves, slouching down in a seat with head between hands. But then a miraculous transformation happened. He usually began very slowly in a tenor voice, sometimes for 10 or 15 minutes, searching for words and intuitively sizing up an audience. Then all hell broke loose. A secret wartime report said that his voice would rise, tempo increase, and get louder and louder, shrieking curses and foul names to frenzied audiences. Rhythms were liturgical, peppered with slogans, repetition of words, and patriotic language such as, "One people, one nation, one leader."

Hitler choreographed everything, knew his audience inside out, and exploited its gullibility. "We want the Führer! We want the Führer!" Fanatical fans pleaded for his autograph. Women fell at his feet and offered marriage. Crowds sobbed, cheered, and screamed at his grand entrances.

Content was designed to arouse basic instincts rather than the intellect as illus-

trated by the following seething snatches from speeches in the 1920s. "There will be no peace in the land until a body is hanging from every lamp post," and "On one point there should be no doubt: we will not let the Jews slit our gullets and not defend ourselves," or "Let us be inhumane! But if we save Germany, then we will have accomplished the world's greatest deed. Let us do injustice! But if we save Germany, then we will have eliminated the world's greatest injustice. Let us be immoral! But if our folk is saved, then we will have opened the way for morality again!"

Hitler wore a military uniform while speaking to give him confidence, like any actor playing a role, exploiting time, space and rhythmic speech patterns for maximum emotional effect. Few denied his power of persuasion over mass audiences. Gregor Strasser, murdered during the Night of the Long Knives, also believed Hitler went into a "trance" and was "carried away by a mystical force." He attributed such an incredible effect "to his uncanny intuition, which infallibly diagnoses the ills from which his audience is suffering" and admitted that Hitler developed into "one of the greatest speakers of the century."

After ranting for hours, Hitler's breath-

ing grew heavy. He became drenched with sweat. Sometimes he nearly collapsed and would be helped off the stage while frenzied audiences gasped in awe at their savior. His valet wrote that after these exhaustive orations he would "wrap Hitler in a thick blanket and escort him home. There he took tablets to prevent getting a chill, drank tea laced with a log of cognac and took hot baths."

Yet, the magic vanished backstage. The insecure Hitler, always surrounded by scores of SS guards, became just another face in the crowd, eating chocolates and cream cakes, watching Mickey Mouse cartoons, and retelling the same threadbare stories. His favorite American movie tune was "Donkey Serenade," and he liked to whistle "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf."

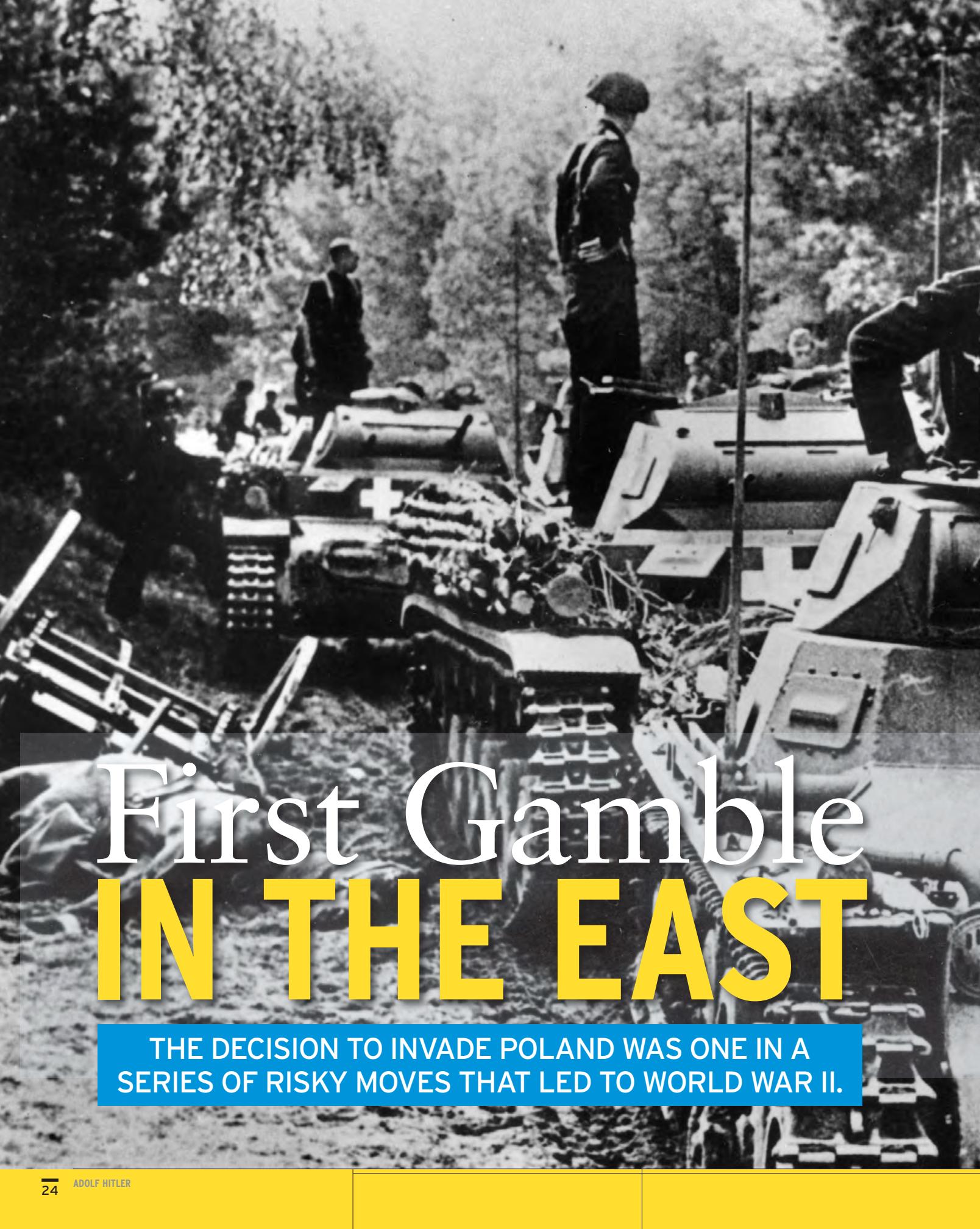
It was not just the ordinary masses that swallowed Hitler's hysterical messianic mission. German philosopher Martin Heidegger saw him as a mystic. King Edward VII and British Prime Minister David Lloyd-George visited the Eagle's Nest. British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain basked in glory for a while after the 1938 Munich conference unaware that Hitler remarked, "That piece of paper is of no further significance whatsoever."

Germany's high command also heard what they wanted to hear—revenge and empowerment. Hitler wrote in 1933 that he gave "the hardest speech of my life" to these militarists. General Wilhelm Keitel called him the greatest warlord of all times, and Field Marshal Gunther von Kluge considered him a genius. For a while, famed Field Marshal Erwin Rommel also saw the Führer as the savior of Germany.

So who was the real Adolf Hitler, the cult figure who, in the end, failed as an artist, failed as a militarist, failed as a political leader? Nobody ever knew, even the Führer himself. Albert Speer recalled, "In retrospect, I am completely uncertain when and where he was ever really himself, his image not distorted by playacting."

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# First Gamble **IN THE EAST**

THE DECISION TO INVADE POLAND WAS ONE IN A  
SERIES OF RISKY MOVES THAT LED TO WORLD WAR II.

## BY CHRISTOPHER MISKIMON

**H**istorians often compare Hitler to a gambler. He kept making risky bets that paid off time and again—until they didn’t. Poland was one example because it led to general war. What brought Hitler to take this risk? With the benefit of hindsight it is seen as enormous, but what did the situation look like to the German Führer and his closest advisers at the time?

The popular modern view of Hitler is that of a raving lunatic, screaming at subordinates while pushing phantom armies around a map in his bunker. While he deserves every negative epithet given him, he did not decide all his strategic and operational decisions from mad, angry rants. In the years leading to World War II there were numerous events that took him down the road from a promise to rebuild the nation to inevitable conflict. However skewed, there was method to his madness, which came close to paying off in the early years of the fighting. The war officially began with the invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, but numerous factors led to this attack.

While many of the calculations for war were based on some modicum of logic and reasoned planning, revenge, the basest of human emotions, played its part. German humiliation over the conditions placed upon the nation at the end of World War I had not abated in the two decades since the conflict ended. Over time the mass emotional reaction to the treaty stipulations became a festering sore among the population. This wound was ripe for exploitation by the Nazi propaganda machine during the party’s rise to power.

The Treaty of Versailles imposed severe restrictions on the German military. The ground forces were limited in size to 100,000 troops in 10 divisions, including

German armored forces in PzKpfw. I and PzKpfw. II tanks pause momentarily along a muddy road somewhere in Poland. A group of officers is aboard a nearby halftrack, one of possibly General Heinz Guderian, commander of the XIX Corps during the invasion of Poland.



Bundesarchiv Bild 146-1976-071-36; Photo: Unknown

4,000 officers. The Army could be used only for the “internal maintenance of order” and defense. Also prohibited were staples of the German military system, such as a general staff, most officer training schools, and any sort of reserves or paramilitary groups. Additionally, tanks and heavy weapons were denied. Chemical weapons were expressly forbidden. Defensive positions along the east bank of the Rhine River had to be demolished for a distance of 50 kilometers from the riverbank. The west bank was similarly denuded of defenses. This left the country defenseless against attack.

The humiliation of Versailles went beyond just military limitations. Germany lost land to Poland and France. The French



received Alsace-Lorraine, lost decades before during the Franco-Prussian War of 1871. The “Polish Corridor,” a strip of land given to Poland granting it access to the Baltic Sea, meant East Prussia was now physically separate from the rest of the country. The formerly German city of Danzig was made a “Free City,” controlled by the Poles despite its largely German population. All of Germany’s overseas colonies and territories were transferred to other nations. Last was a crushing debt of reparations, equivalent to billions of dollars today.

The cumulative effect of the treaty requirements created a sense of injustice among the German populace, which the Nazis were all too willing to use in their grab for power. The party came into power on a promise to right the wrongs of Versailles and make Germany strong again. Germany suffered many internal

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**ABOVE:** Jubilant young Austrian citizens cheer the news that their country has been annexed by Nazi Germany and is now a part of the Third Reich. Hitler coerced Austrian leaders into accepting the union, which was completed in March 1938. **LEFT:** In a bold and risky maneuver, Hitler ordered German troops into the Rhineland in the spring of 1936. Hitler's generals feared the aggressive move would spark French military intervention.

troubles throughout the 1920s and early 30s, something the German people remembered. Once national power was restored in the late 1930s, it became a natural, brutal progression to use that power against nations that had taken German lands. The Polish Corridor stood out in particular; regaining it meant reconnecting East Prussia to Germany proper.

With revenge in mind, the next step for Hitler was rearmament. This was the key prerequisite for any resurgence of Germany as a major power. Even before Hitler began rearmament in late 1933, the military had been secretly preparing for a fast expansion through a combination of training, liberal interpretation of the treaty restrictions, and secret weapons development projects. This allowed the Nazis to quickly create a massive military machine, faster than Germany’s opponents thought possible.

Initial steps included rebuilding the German arms industry so it could produce the necessary weapons. The plans for fast wartime expansion of the Army were instead applied to peacetime growth. The first increase was to 300,000 troops in 21 divisions. This program was to be finished by 1937, but Hitler advanced this timetable to the fall of 1934, barely a year later. During this period Hitler began to consolidate his power, moving against men like Ernst Röhm, the leader of the Nazi Party’s paramilitary arm, the Sturmabteilung (SA). He also absorbed the powers of the military commander in chief when the German President Paul von Hindenburg died in August 1934. Afterward German soldiers and sailors were required to swear an oath of allegiance to Hitler personally, a throwback to the oath given the kaiser during the imperial period. By the end of 1934, German Army strength reached 240,000.

On March 16, 1935, Hitler publicly rejected the Versailles Treaty and ordered a further expansion of the army to 36 divisions under a new defense law. Conscription was also reintroduced. Within two months another law created the Luftwaffe. The conscription program created a large pool of trained manpower, something the Germans lacked due to Versailles. Changes at the command level also made the German military more effective. The Reichswehr was renamed the Wehrmacht, with the three branches called the Heer (army), Kriegsmarine (navy), and Luftwaffe (air force). The general staff was

rebuilt, and Hitler was solidly placed as the military's supreme commander. Generals who disagreed with Hitler were retired or removed through scandal or accusations of misconduct. The Führer created a modern, powerful force completely under his control.

While this buildup was touted as smooth and organized with Teutonic efficiency, the process was difficult. German industry needed time to create modern weapons, most of which were only designs on a drawing board. Raw materials, trained labor, and factory capacity were insufficient to provide for all three services' needs. The navy took a back seat to the Army and air force. This decision made sense because Germany's primary opponents bordered the nation, rendering a powerful fleet unnecessary in the short term.

Building on its secret experiments, the Army started an ambitious program for armored vehicles, but they were learning as they went. The first models were lightly armed and armored vehicles, which would later prove inferior to enemy tanks, though the Germans usually handled theirs better. Without making sacrifices elsewhere, it was impossible to build as many vehicles and artillery pieces as were needed. Hitler was unwilling to strain the peacetime German economy, so production rates were kept low.

The rapid expansion also placed a strain on personnel. There were not enough qualified officers and NCOs to fill all the required billets. Fast promotions and the recall of World War I veterans alleviated these problems, but only to a limited extent. Many of the veterans were getting too old for field service and needed refresher training. Many officers were lost to the newly formed Luftwaffe, and many staff officers for air units were ground forces men untrained and inexperienced in air operations. Another quick solution was to militarize entire police units to capitalize on the training and discipline of their NCOs and officers.

Despite these difficulties, rearmament did produce results. By October 1937, the army reached an active strength of 39 divisions in 14 corps, including three panzer and four motorized divisions. There were 29 divisions in reserve with more of their soldiers having recent training through the conscription program. In 1938, a dozen more divisions, including two panzer and four motorized, were also formed along with 22 more reserve divisions. Some of these units came from the absorption of the Austrian Army, which

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During the 1930s, the German armed forces undertook an extensive and mostly clandestine rearmament program. In this photo of the period, German soldiers ride in a wagon which is towing a wooden antitank gun.

occurred that year. Further expansion occurred in 1939.

Possessing a powerful army gave Hitler options in the expansionist risks he took. Like many Germans, he sought revenge for perceived injustices. For the Führer the scales could only be balanced through war, and a strong military made war feasible, even desirable, as it would prove Germany was again formidable and to be respected. By 1939, the Army had 102 divisions, half of them active. Total strength was around 1.8 million troops. While there were still shortages in certain types of weapons and equipment, the Nazi propaganda machine had done its work, and these shortcomings were not apparent. Foreign observers saw a formidable modern force, and Hitler was happy to let them believe that image.

Prior to the Polish Crisis, Germany had gotten extensive practice in territorial acquisition, though without war. Instead, political maneuvering and bluff achieved Nazi goals up to that point. There was tension; war clouds loomed over Europe for several years before September 1939. However, until then each crisis had been resolved in Germany's favor, a winning streak that increased confidence within the Reich in its own ability and the moral cowardice of its opponents. Hitler was susceptible to a gambler's faith in a winning streak, and this was a factor in his later decision to invade Poland.

The Third Reich's first success came in the Saar in 1935. This region of Germany was placed under Anglo-French occupation and control in 1920 for a period of 15 years. The Saar was an industrial center and contained coal fields that were given to France. A commission oversaw the territory until 1935, when a plebiscite was held to determine what would happen to the area. The situation was a reminder of German defeat in World War I and another territory stripped from the nation despite the ethnically German citizens in residence.

Once the Nazis came to power in 1933, large numbers of Germans who opposed their rule moved to the Saar precisely to escape them. Over the next two years, as

the plebiscite grew near, these opponents of Hitler's regime campaigned to have the region remain under French occupation. The Führer had other plans, as regaining the Saar would be a propaganda victory for his government. He directed Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels to conduct a media campaign aimed at swaying the populace to vote for return to the Reich. When the vote came in January 1935, over 90 percent of the voters chose to return to Germany. On March 1 the Saar became German again. With German reoccupation came the arrest of those considered to have collaborated with the French government and Nazi opponents who had fled there previously. Regaining the Saar was a first step for Nazi aggression.

The following year Hitler went further and reoccupied the Rhineland. The demilitarization of the area was stipulated in the Versailles Treaty and made permanent in the Locarno Treaty of 1925, which sought to normalize relations between various European powers. The Rhineland was occupied by Allied troops until 1935 under the terms of the treaty. In actuality these troops were withdrawn by 1930. Over the next five years, as the Nazis came to power and more openly disregarded the Versailles Treaty, German reoccupation of the Rhineland became an expected development, calculated to cause a crisis.

In early 1936 Hitler gambled and sent a small force into the demilitarized zone. Hitler knew there was a possibility of war but deemed it minimal; when War Minister Field Marshal Werner Von Blomberg expressed his fears, Hitler told him German troops would be withdrawn if French forces entered the Rhineland. The Reich went ahead with the move on March 7, 1936, sending a handful of infantry battalions into the Rhineland, where they joined local police and prepared for a French counterattack, planning a fighting withdrawal if necessary. When French troops stayed on their side of the border, Hitler's confidence was bolstered, and he ordered the troops to stay.

Two years later Hitler made more moves that consolidated his nation's position even

further and reinforced his belief in the moral cowardice of the Western powers. In March 1938, Germany annexed Austria, incorporating its military into the Reich. There was a small pro-Nazi movement within Austria that was agitating for integration with Germany. This movement was suppressed by the Austrian government, which believed most Austrians wanted nothing to do with Hitler. On March 9, Austrian Chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg announced a plebiscite to allow voters to state their preference about integration with Germany.

The Nazi propaganda machine went into full swing, announcing riots in Austria and unfair rules for the vote to sway the decision against integration. It claimed the uproar was a plea by Austrians for Germany to enter Austria and restore order. On March 12, Wehrmacht troops crossed the border, meeting no opposition. Hitler himself entered Austria that evening. Within days the union of Germany and Austria, known as the Anschluss, was announced. Hitler had once again increased German power without a war.

The second Nazi move of 1938 was the annexation of the Sudetenland. This event, the result of an agreement meant to maintain peace, was a major step toward the conflict to come. After obtaining Austria with such relative ease, Hitler turned his gaze

**RIGHT:** After signing the death warrant of the nation of Czechoslovakia at the Munich conference, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain returns to Britain waving his 'trophy' of the policy of appeasement. Chamberlain proclaimed that he had achieved 'peace in our time.'  
**BELOW:** Following the annexation of the Sudetenland, German troops eventually occupied all of neighboring Czechoslovakia. On March 15, 1939, German forces rolled through the streets of the Czech capital of Prague. Some Czech citizens offered the Nazi salute; others were determined to resist.



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toward the north-northwestern area of Czechoslovakia, a region known as the Sudetenland. Many ethnic Germans lived in this area, making it a good target for expansion. The usual propaganda claims were made, stating the Czech government was abusing ethnic Germans within its borders.

The Czechs prepared for war, but no one else did. Hitler met with representatives of Britain, France, and Italy in Munich during late September. There, he obtained an agreement from those powers to give the Sudetenland to Germany. Without support, Czechoslovakia had little choice but to acquiesce. German troops entered the Sudetenland to the applause of its Germanic populace.

Supposedly this was Germany's last territorial demand; returning from Munich, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain made his now infamous statement of having achieved "peace with honour" and "peace in our time." That peace lasted less than six months; on March 15, 1939, the Wehrmacht marched into the rest of Czechoslovakia. Appeasement had failed, and Hitler had Poland in his sights. With Czech territory in German hands, Poland could be invaded from both the west and south, making that nation's defense more difficult.

The Polish Crisis began 10 days after the Nazis took Czechoslovakia. Hitler ordered the Wehrmacht High Command (Oberkommando Der Wehrmacht, OKW) to prepare a military campaign against Poland. He tried obtaining concessions from the Poles regarding Danzig and the Polish Corridor, including threats of military action. The efforts proved futile as the Poles refused to give in. Both sides began aggressive propaganda campaigns, with the Nazis claiming Polish atrocities against Germans in the corridor area.

Given his string of successes, Hitler was willing to gamble on Poland, although the situation in 1939 was worse than in earlier years. Unlike at Munich, there was no agreement with France and Great Britain for a resolution, and previous German actions had destroyed trust in Hitler's word. The Third Reich's racist policies and actions were also turning world opinion against it. Other members of Hitler's civilian and military hierarchy were unwilling to express resistance to his plans. The Nazi leader had decided on another risky gamble, and with his absolute control there was no one to stop him.

With the decision made, a plan had to be created. During April 1939, OKW issued

Fully equipped for aggressive action, German troops, who appear to be fresh and not yet bloodied by fighting, march along a road in Poland. Although German and Soviet troops had completed their seizure of Polish territory in a matter of weeks, the campaign was more costly than some senior commanders had envisioned.

its annual directive to the armed forces. Within it was Fall Weiss (Case White). The plan was introduced with a statement from Hitler himself describing current relations with Poland. It required the German military to be prepared to attack by September 1. The plan stressed surprise. Mobilization would not take place until just before the actual invasion. Only regular Army units would be used at first, since calling up reserves would alert the Poles.

These active units would be secretly moved into assembly areas along the frontier before being ordered into their jumping-off points. The Army could also attack from Czech territory. There were also arrangements for defending the border with France, the Baltic Sea area, and German airspace. All this would effectively isolate Poland from her Western supporters until it was too late.

On April 28, Hitler nullified the German non-aggression treaty with Poland and

demanded resolution on the Danzig issue. German operatives were sent into Danzig, where they attacked a customs house and tore down Polish flags. Polish actions against ethnic Germans were given wide press coverage. There was a Nazi faction in Danzig, and it clamored for return to Germany. This was the beginning of a months-long campaign to pave the way for German goals, with or without war.

Over the following months further diplomatic machinations took place. On May 22, a pact was signed with Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, taking pressure off Germany's southern flank. However, Hitler assured Mussolini there would be

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**Adolf Hitler visits German troops in the field. At his left is General Erwin Rommel, later to gain fame during the Battle of France and the war in the North African desert. General Walter von Reichenau is visible near the front of the group.**

no war, and the Italians made no promise of military support. This kept Italy from the Allied camp and threatened France's and Britain's Mediterranean holdings. Hitler also received visits from the leaders of Yugoslavia, Hungary, and Bulgaria. These affairs were accompanied by extravagant displays of German military power, with scores of aircraft roaring overhead or hundreds of tanks clanking past.

A major victory for the Nazis was the rapprochement with the Soviet Union. The British and French were seeking a tacit alliance with the Soviets as a counterbalance to Germany, but this new development quashed that hope. Russia and Germany secretly negotiated an agreement for respective spheres of influence. The Soviets would have a free hand in Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia along with eastern Poland. In exchange, Germany would regain Danzig, the Polish Corridor, and western Poland.

Openly, the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was a non-aggression treaty between the nations. This was a surprise development as the Nazis were staunchly anti-communist. Both Hitler and Stalin still expected eventual war; the Soviets expected conflict as early as 1944. While war would come much sooner with the German invasion on June 22, 1941, in August 1939 the issue seemed settled.

The Polish Crisis came to a head in August. The Germans placed more pressure on Poland over Danzig and the corridor, with civil disturbances taking place. The Poles stood firm, bolstered by assurances of support from France and Britain. On August 12-13, Italian Foreign Minister Count Galeazzo Ciano met with Hitler to discuss a diplomatic solution. Italy did not want its ally going to war; the nation was still recovering

from its campaigns in Albania, Ethiopia, and Spain and was not ready to fight the French and British. The Italian military needed time to modernize its forces and did not expect to be ready until 1942. Hitler, confident in his course, would not be swayed. Ciano felt the Germans had breached their agreement, but there was little to be done.

On August 17, the Nazis enacted their scheme to justify invasion. The Wehrmacht supplied Polish Army uniforms to operatives commanded by senior SS officer Reinhard Heydrich to create incidents of Polish attacks on German soil. Hitler addressed his military leaders about the issue on August 22, admitting an incident would be "arranged." The morality of such an act was irrelevant; only victory mattered. He thought it unlikely the British and French would intervene, and if they

did they could not reinforce Poland directly. If war came, Germany would win. Hitler also mentioned the impending treaty with the Soviets, which was signed the next day. The speech ended with a statement of belief that the Wehrmacht could carry out any order successfully.

When the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact became public on August 23, it seemed war was inevitable. Hitler ordered the attack to begin on August 26. The next day the British sent Poland a written guarantee that Britain and France would come to its aid if Germany invaded. When he learned of the move, Hitler rescinded his attack order and engaged in a last-minute move to forestall the involvement of the Western Allies. He promised to respect the current borders with France and to support the British. This offer did not impress either nation, which had no reason to trust such promises. Negotiations were essentially broken off.

On August 31, Hitler signed the order for war with Poland, to begin the next morning at 4:45. At 8 PM on the night before the invasion, Germans in Polish uniforms "captured" a German radio station in Silesia. A broadcast in Polish announced an attack on



**ABOVE:** Heroic Polish cavalrymen ride toward the sounds of battle. Some stories of Polish lancers attacking German tanks emerged after the campaign ended. These remain a topic of debate. **BELow:** The Polish armed forces offered resistance to both German and Soviet attacks but were overwhelmed by superior numbers and tactics. In this photo, Polish tanks maneuver during war games in the spring of 1939.



AP Photos

Germany. Soon German police subdued the “attackers.” Casualties were found dressed in Polish uniforms, but they were actually condemned German criminals. Within hours the full might of the Wehrmacht was thrown against the Poles.

When war with Poland came, the Wehrmacht pursued a plan to envelop and destroy the Polish Army west of the Vistula and Narew Rivers. The main blow came from Army Group South under Generaloberst Gerd Von Rundstedt, striking northeast out of Silesia toward Warsaw. A secondary thrust would come from occupied Czechoslovakia to handle Polish troops in Galicia. Generaloberst Fedor von Bock's Army Group North would strike east through the Polish Corridor to link with East Prussia. That done, Bock would then advance on Warsaw from the north.

Polish plans were for a forward defense in western Poland. This was required; much of the Polish Army was made up of ethnic Poles who lived in the western part of the nation. They would need time to mobilize. A quick defense would hopefully also draw Britain and France into the war sooner. It was an imperfect plan, as it allowed the Poles to be decisively engaged early in the fighting. Polish units would also have to cover more

territory than was prudent. Combined with Allied underestimation of Germany's new army and tactics, it was a recipe for defeat, though in fairness the Poles were in a bad position no matter what plans they enacted.

Despite all the mobilizations and signs, the attack was a tactical surprise for the Poles. The Luftwaffe commenced bombing while the old German battleship *Schleswig-Holstein* began shelling the Polish fortress at Westerplatte. The Polish Navy was attacked and would be effectively destroyed within a few days. The advancing ground troops swept aside a few Polish patrols and border guards and moved into Poland itself. Paramilitary troops from both sides engaged in a vicious struggle for Danzig.

The Polish Corridor was defended by two infantry divisions and a cavalry brigade. The German 4th Army attacked, and the Polish cavalry fought a series of delaying actions, including a raid that resulted in a cavalry charge against a surprised German infantry battalion. They were only beaten off with the arrival of a few armored cars. The next day Italian war correspondents were brought to the scene. They reported being told the Polish cavalrymen had been killed while charging German panzers. The story took hold of the popular imagination until it became an accepted reality, but the tale is just a myth.

As 4th Army hit the Polish Corridor, 3rd Army advanced out of East Prussia toward Warsaw. Two corps attacked but ran into the Mlawa Line, a fortified zone guarding the obvious route of attack. The Germans tried to outflank the position, but swamps secured both flanks, bogging down the effort after several assaults failed. The Polish Mazowiecka Cavalry Brigade met the German 1st Cavalry Brigade along the Ulatkowka River. Engagements between mounted patrols soon led to heavy dismounted combat. By sunset of the first day of the war, 3rd Army was stopped cold.

Making the main effort, Army Group South saw extensive action, particularly with its 8th and 10th Armies in Silesia. They intended to strike against the Polish



**ABOVE:** This photo has been reproduced countless times during the decades since World War II but has lost none of its poignancy. A 10-year-old girl weeps over the body of her older sister, who has just been killed during a German air raid near Warsaw. **RIGHT:** German armored spearheads raced across Poland, trapping large numbers of Polish troops. Simultaneously, Luftwaffe aircraft destroyed many planes of the Polish Air Force on the ground.

Armies Lodz and Krakow, get over the Warta River, and cut off enemy forces in western Poland. Afterward they would advance on Warsaw. These two Wehrmacht formations contained many of the German armored and mechanized divisions.

Initially fighting was light since the Polish defenses were 20 miles behind the border. The worst fighting took place when the 4th Panzer Division attacked the Wolynska Cavalry Brigade at the village of Mokra. The horsemen were assisted by an armored train, while the Germans had trouble coordinating their tanks and infantry. A Stuka raid succeeded in destroying Polish supplies and killing many of their horses, but the cavalrymen held firm. High casualties forced them to finally retreat at sunset, with German tanks hounding them. Meanwhile, Army Krakow suffered badly, its 7th Infantry Division being cut off and overwhelmed by several German divisions. The fortified city of Katowice fared better, however, limiting German success. The rear areas were threatened by guerrilla units of ethnic Germans formed by German intelligence before the war.

Advancing from Slovakia, the 22nd Panzer Corps got around the Polish border units manning the Dunajec Line, forcing Army Krakow to deploy its 10th Mechanized Brigade. The attack was stopped only when the Polish 6th Infantry Division was also committed. Two German mountain divisions attacked across the Carpathian Mountains against Army Karpaty, but the terrain kept them from making any gains.

The Luftwaffe tried to destroy the Polish Air Force on the ground, but most of it was already dispersed to auxiliary fields. Despite more myths, only 24 Polish combat aircraft were destroyed on the ground during the entire campaign, though many trainers and unserviceable planes were destroyed. The Luftwaffe also hit railways and important roads in preplanned attacks. Also contrary to legend, the Germans were not yet capable of hasty close air support missions. In the days to come more planned targets were hit, and Polish troop movements were successfully interdicted, hampering the mobilization of reserves. A few close air support missions were attempted late in the campaign.

A bombing attack on Warsaw took heavy losses to the fighters of the Polish Pursuit Brigade on the first day of the war, but Luftwaffe numerical superiority enabled repeated strikes and by September 6 the Polish unit had lost 70 percent of its fighters, forcing its withdrawal. The rest of the Polish fighter strength was used up in the skies over the main

Map © 2016 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN





**ABOVE:** German Junkers Ju-87 Stuka dive bombers fly in formation above the Polish countryside. During the blitzkrieg, these planes acted as flying artillery, striking deep behind enemy lines to disrupt supply and communications, inflict casualties on troop concentrations, and spread terror among Polish civilians. **BETWEEN:** Polish infantrymen execute field maneuvers during peacetime exercises in April 1939, just five months before World War II erupted in Europe. The Poles fought back on two fronts but were conquered by the Germans from the west and the Soviets from the east.



fighting, inflicting at least 126 losses on the Germans. Polish bomber crews flew bravely against the advancing German armies but likewise suffered terribly for little effect.

Back in the north, the Wehrmacht continued advancing along the corridor while Polish forces withdrew southward, leaving the Westerplatte garrison cut off. In the Tuchola Forest, the 3rd Panzer Division managed to cross the Brda River. Two German divisions also advanced west down the corridor from East Prussia, nearly trapping the Polish units between them. Only one Polish division was able to escape the encirclement on September 3. The Germans kept up pressure on the Mlawa Line, finally starting to out-

flank it. The beleaguered Polish cavalry was reinforced with the 8th Infantry Division but could not hold the line any longer. By the next day the Mlawa defenders and the remaining Poles not encircled in Pomerania were ordered to withdraw to the Vistula Line.

During the night of September 2, the Polish Podlaska Cavalry Brigade conducted a raid into East Prussia, the only Polish attack on German territory. It withdrew after some skirmishes with German militia. The Polish 20th Infantry continued manning the Mlawa Line to allow their comrades to withdraw. It was soon surrounded but continued to resist. Army Modlin tried to hold at the town of the same name, but German river crossing operations threatened the Polish position. After a failed counterattack, the Poles withdrew again across the San River. Another Polish garrison tried to delay the Germans at Modlin but was also surrounded by the advancing Nazis.

The German army groups now began their encirclement of Army Poznan in western Poland. Army Poznan's commander, General Tadeusz Kutrzeba, asked to attack the German 8th Army, the northern formation of Army Group South. He was refused permission by Marshal Edward Rydz-Smigly, supreme Polish commander, who feared the unit would be destroyed; he wanted to avoid a decisive battle west of the Vistula. Sadly, the Germans were vulnerable on this flank and feared just such an attack.

The Polish 7th Division, decimated earlier, was mauled again by the 1st Panzer Division and several infantry units as the Germans exploited the gap between the Polish Armies Lodz and Krakow. This fighting enabled the German 10th Army, with its heavy armored contingent, to move toward Warsaw. The tanks struck out across flat farmland through the heart of Poland. The Polish units south of this exploitation withdrew skillfully, delaying the 2nd Panzer Division and maintaining their cohesion.

The panzer divisions made for Warsaw directly toward the Polish Army Prusy, which had been placed there in expecta-

tion that the Germans would advance from that direction. Containing three infantry divisions and a cavalry brigade, this army also had a small force of tanks to defend against the panzers bearing down on them. The 1st and 4th Panzer Divisions quickly made for Piotrkow, where they were met by Polish infantry and the 2nd Tank Battalion with its 7TP light tanks. The Polish tankers fought well, knocking out 33 German armored vehicles, but since they were not concentrated their efforts had no lasting effect.

Meanwhile, the German 10th Army pushed back Army Krakow to Kielce by

quickly, for the high command to change its mind. Meanwhile, the Poles continued retreating to the Vistula. Rydz-Smigly became worried that the fast-moving Germans would cut off his forces and decided to move his headquarters forward to Brzesc. This location was not able to handle the level of communications needed, and the move proved a major error as the high command could not effectively communicate with units in the field.

The fast-moving German units were easily outdistancing the Polish forces now; time and again Polish troops reached a position only to find German tanks behind them. The gap between Army Prusy and Army Lodz was the worst, with the 1st and 4th Panzer Divisions pushing ever deeper toward Warsaw. Other German forces were moving through the Polish Corridor for another offensive. General Bock was allowed to push his troops down the east bank of the Vistula to endanger the Poles defending along that line.

With the Germans closing on Warsaw, Marshal Rydz-Smigly finally began to consider the counterattack General Kutrzeba was suggesting, hoping to relieve pressure on Army Lodz and allow the Poles time to reorganize around Warsaw and the Vistula River.

The counterattack came along the Bzura River on September 9; the Germans were still aware of the vulnerability of their flank but were lulled by bad intelligence reports and the lack of Polish movement up to this point. Three Polish infantry divisions (14th, 17th, and 25th) attacked the German 24th and 30th Infantry Divisions. A pair of Polish cavalry brigades guarded the flanks of the advance. The initial fighting was heavy, but the Poles threw in their reserves supported by armor and turned the tide. Both German divisions fell back; the 30th lost more than 1,500 as prisoners by September 10. The Poles were finally striking back.

Rundstedt remained calm and ordered the 1st and 4th Panzer Divisions to turn west from the outskirts of Warsaw and begin encircling Army Poznan. He hoped to cut off and destroy this large concentration of enemy troops. Other units were also rushed to the area, establishing numerical superiority. Within two days the Polish offensive was done, and Kutrzeba was ordered to break through to the south toward the Romanian border. However, his com-

mand was now badly outnumbered, nine Polish divisions with two cavalry brigades against 19 German divisions, of which five were armored or mechanized.

Kutrzeba understood his predicament and instead moved eastward. The Germans attacked, but the fighting proved difficult until air support arrived. On September 16, some 820 Luftwaffe planes attacked along with the 16th Panzer Corps on the ground. By that evening Kutrzeba ordered his troops to try and escape the pocket through a gap at Sochaczew. Elements of two divisions and two cavalry brigades made it out, but 120,000 Poles were taken prisoner when the Bzura Pocket capitulated on September 18. Both Army Poznan and Army Pomorze were destroyed. Their sacrifice had delayed the German advance on Warsaw and allowed their comrades to prepare better defenses, but the price was staggering.

The Polish command was operating in confusion as stragglers and partially mobilized units began arriving, not knowing where to go. The Polish leadership within Warsaw decided to make a stand and defend the city. Since Rundstedt's Army Group South was still fighting at Bzura, Army Group North attacked the city on September 15. It was led

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September 5, further opening the path to Warsaw. General Kutrzeba again asked to attack the German flank but was refused. That evening Marshal Rydz-Smigly ordered all four engaged Polish armies—Poznan, Prusy, Lodz and Krakow—to withdraw to the Vistula.

The Germans noticed the Polish moves; Rundstedt and other field commanders realized what was happening and asked to penetrate deeper to encircle the Poles. OKW still worried about a French attack in the west, however, and delayed. It took until September 9, when it was becoming obvious the French were not moving





ABOVE: Captured Polish soldiers are marched toward temporary camps after surrendering to the advancing Germans. Many Polish troops were cut off and forced to capitulate as the German armored spearheads moved rapidly toward their objectives. BELOW: The Nazi campaign to eradicate European Jewry continued as German forces occupied Poland. The day after Poland surrendered, SS personnel were engaged in rounding up Polish Jews and other undesirable elements of the population for resettlement or execution. OPPOSITE: German and Soviet troops met near the city of Brest-Litovsk and celebrated their successful military victory in Poland. Hitler and Soviet Premier Josef Stalin had secretly agreed to partition Poland once their conquest was complete.



Both: National Archives

by the German 3rd Army, which had troops on both banks of the Vistula. The Germans entered the suburbs of the city and engaged in heavy fighting, but since Warsaw was not yet surrounded some Polish troops were still filtering in. After September 21, the Germans finished mopping up the Bzura Pocket and redistributed divisions to surround Warsaw. Army Group South spread out along the south and west sides of the city.

On September 17, Polish fortunes reached a new low when the Soviet Union moved into Poland with 41 divisions and 12 tank brigades totaling over 466,000 troops. Some Poles expected the Soviets might be coming to assist them, but those hopes were quickly dashed. Most of the Polish Army was fighting to the west, leaving only token border troops on the eastern frontier. On average, there was one Polish battalion against a Soviet corps. There was some fighting, mostly skirmishing, but all real hope was now lost. Marshal Rydz-Smigly ordered all Polish units to make for the Romanian border.

On September 23, the Germans began their first attempt to take Warsaw, supported by 1,000 field guns, but few gains were made. The Poles were resisting fiercely.

On September 25, another attack came with both artillery and air bombardment. Known as "Black Monday," the city was pelted with bombs and shells. Even German Junkers Ju-52 transport planes were pressed into service, dropping many incendiary bombs. There was so much smoke that target identification was almost impossible, and many Luftwaffe aircraft dropped their payloads on German troops.

The next day the Germans seized three old forts on the south side of Warsaw. To increase the suffering within the city and hopefully speed the surrender, Hitler ordered that no civilians were allowed to leave, trapping them inside the shattered capital. During the evening of September 26, Army Warsaw's commander, General Juliusz Röhm, sent word to the Germans that he was prepared to discuss surrender. The fighting ended the next day, and more than 140,000 Polish troops became prisoners. A separate Polish force at Modlin held out for another two days, and then it too gave up, 24,000 soldiers marching into captivity.

A small Polish force, east of Warsaw and out of communication, was unaware of the city's surrender and tried to get there to join the fighting. It ran into the German 13th Infantry Division, a motorized unit, and fought until October 6. Since by this point the Soviets had invaded eastern Poland, there was no longer anywhere for Polish troops to go, and the campaign was effectively over.

Hitler's great gamble for Poland had succeeded at the cost of 48,000 casualties and a nation now at war. Further gambles would bring France, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, and Norway under his control by the end of 1940. It would be to the east, on the vast unending plains of the Soviet Union, where the gambles would begin to fail, leading to the ruin of the Reich Hitler had claimed would last a millennium.

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**ADOLF HITLER** rose to power, popularized his dark, Nazi vision for the future of Europe and the world, and eventually died amid the rubble of his burning capital city as the Soviet Red Army conquered Berlin. For 12 years, Hitler exerted his will on Germany and affected the course of world events. However, he was not alone. Hitler's close associates enabled their Führer to exert absolute authority in Nazi Germany. They canonized his Nazi philosophy, enacted his policies, executed his persecution of European Jewry, directed his military machine, and ultimately facilitated the ruin of the German nation and the deaths of millions of people.

Driven by blind allegiance to the Führer and personal ambition, Hitler's top lieutenants were fully engaged in the Nazi reach for world domination. To a man, they paid dearly for the misery they inflicted—at the end of a hangman's noose, enduring long prison sentences, committing suicide rather than answering and atoning for their crimes, or simply living with the overwhelming guilt of having contributed to the most evil regime in modern history.



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BY BLAINE TAYLOR

# Hitler's HENCHMEN

## HERMANN GÖRING

By 1945, Reich Marshal Hermann Göring wore far too many hats, representing a virtual phalanx of top government and military positions within the 12-year Third Reich. He had reached the point where he could do none of them justice, and this was a major factor as to why Nazi Germany lost World War II.

Göring was the military commander in chief of the Luftwaffe. Earlier he had served as its field marshal as well as its civilian minister of aviation, in effect, reporting to himself.

As president of the Council of Ministers for the Defense of the Reich and a member of the Secret Cabinet Council, he advised Hitler on all matters concerning peace and

the waging of war. Thus he was partly responsible for Nazi Germany not getting the atomic bomb.

He was also the civil administrative prime minister of Prussia, in charge of Germany's largest single state, and had once commanded as its regular police. He also established both a new secret state police, the Gestapo, which Hitler later took away from him, as had the SA Storm Troopers a decade earlier.

Simply put, Hitler never trusted Göring in command of too many troops without counterbalancing forces, such as the SS, in place. Thus Göring was also denied in 1938 the post of war minister and in 1941 that of commander in chief of the Army, both of which the cautious Führer kept to

himself, with disastrous results.

Before he relinquished the police to Himmler in 1934, Göring established the world's premier telephone wiretapping service disguised as the Research Office, in which he had recorded both incoming and outgoing phone calls, including those of foreign embassies and newspapers, and also monitored all telegrams.

Legislatively, he was the president of the German parliament, the Reichstag, to which he had been elected a Nazi deputy, and was appointed as the civilian minister of the sport of hunting and the German national forestry service.

In 1936, Göring took on the task of running the German economy via the Nazi Four-Year Plan that aped the economic

The Führer's top associates steered their nation into ruin during World War II.



Offering a stiff Nazi salute to a gathering crowd at the Walhalla Temple in 1938, Adolf Hitler stands before a cadre of Nazi leaders. The temple was completed in 1840 to honor great heroes of the German nation. Hitler envisioned his Nazi regime as a continuation of Aryan supremacy. OPPOSITE: Arriving at the American detention center in Augsburg in May 1945, the arrogant Hermann Göring is soon to be stripped of all decorations and rank insignia before standing trial for war crimes at Nuremberg.

blueprints of the Soviet Union. In 1942, he sought the vacant post of Minister of Armaments, but Hitler checkmated him with Albert Speer instead.

Göring was twice named as Hitler's political successor as Führer: in secret in December 1934 and publicly on September 1, 1939, during the Reich Chancellor's speech announcing the Nazi invasion of Poland.

Hitler used Göring as a roving goodwill ambassador to foreign capitals and was prepared to allow him to negotiate the Reich's surrender to the Allies, but only after the Führer's own death. When Göring got antsy waiting for the final baton to pass to him, he jumped the gun by seeming to usurp the still living Führer's offices and was fired from all his own as a result.

A widower who remarried, Göring was faithful to his wives and a loving father by all accounts, but he was also the man who signed two orders to launch the Holocaust against the Jews, plotted and waged aggressive wars, authorized murder without trial, and was convicted on all four criminal counts at Nuremberg in 1946, escaping the hangman's rope by hours only by committing suicide at the age of 53 with a cyanide capsule in his maximum security cell.

Named Reich Marshal on July 19, 1940, Göring was then and remains the highest ranking German military officer of all time.

His sole survivor, daughter Edda, is the female spitting image of her father, and lives in South Africa, age 78. Her mother, actress Emmy, died in 1973 at age 80.

## RUDOLF HESS

Born to German parents in British Egypt prior to the Great War, Rudolf Hess was named second after Göring to succeed Hitler on September 1, 1939. Like Göring, the moody, mystic Hess was also happily married, to Ilse Prohl Hess, and loved their sole child, son Wolf Rudiger Hess, his later biographer and champion of release from Allied imprisonment.

Rudolf Hess never was released, spending a full 46 years of his life as a sort of Nazi Man in the Iron Mask, whose identity and even his death, possibly via an alleged political murder by the British, are still debated.

Also like Göring, Hess trained as a pilot in World War I. However, he never saw combat. Göring had commanded the famed Richthofen Squadron in 1918 as an ace with a disputed record of 22 aerial kills. Both men were badly wounded during World War I. Hess went on to win the coveted German Zugspitze air race in 1934. Both met fellow aviator Charles Lindbergh.

Both joined the Nazi Party after hearing Hitler speak but once, and both took part in the failed Munich Beer Hall Putsch, the failed attempt to seize the Bavarian government in 1923. Both fled, but Hess returned to be jailed with the Führer for high treason.

During that mutual imprisonment at Landsberg, Hess served as Hitler's sounding board during the drafting of his leader's first book, *Mein Kampf*. This led to the released Führer naming "my Rudi" as his party second in command.

Hess played but a minor role in the German government as an appointed minister without portfolio up to May 1941, and yet he, again like Göring, co-signed most of the repressive anti-Jewish legislation of the regime. In 1934, Hess was also the leading Nazi behind the failed attempt to seize the Austrian government by force.

A Reich leader as well, Hess ran the Nazi Party organization during 1933-1941 from the Brown House in Munich and another office in Berlin. Unlike Göring—the lord of many mansions, multiple salaries, graft from bribery, and the infamous recipient of stolen art—Hess won public esteem by living in a modest home in Munich while he was in office.

More than anything else, the coming of war in 1939 separated Hess from his beloved Führer's side, since he had no role in waging the war. Hitler forbade Hess from becoming a Luftwaffe fighter pilot. Hess was not banned from flying the latest Messerschmitt aircraft at Augsberg, however, and it was there that he planned one of the most daring aerial flights and secret diplomatic missions in all history, his abortive attempt to reach the British via Scotland on May 10, 1941.

Whether Hitler knew of it in advance or not is still being debated today. The British government of Prime Minister Winston Churchill did take Hess seriously enough to have him interviewed by both the Royal Air Force and the Foreign Office several times. Hess

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Luftwaffe chief Hermann Göring admires a painting that has been given to him by his beloved Führer Adolf Hitler in 1938. Top Nazis plundered the artwork and treasure of Europe during the war years, and much of the stolen booty has never been recovered.



In this 1938 photo, Hitler's deputy Rudolf Hess stands admiringly at the left of his Führer during a parade in Berlin. Hess later flew to Scotland in an abortive attempt to broker a peace deal between Great Britain and Nazi Germany.

was kept confined for the rest of his natural life because the British had possibly considered staying neutral in the Russo-German war that came six weeks later, and may even have weighed joining in it. During his last 21 years, Hess was the sole remaining inmate of Spandau Prison near Berlin.

On July 20, 2011, with familial consent, the Hess grave at Wunsiedel, Germany, was reopened. Hess's remains were then cremated and scattered at sea. His famous tombstone was destroyed, thus denying a shrine to modern neo-Nazis.

Did Rudolf Hess really hang himself with an electrical cord at age 93? The debate continues.

### MARTIN BORMANN

Hess's stunning overnight departure from the Nazi political scene brought more power to his own deputy and liaison with Hitler, Martin Bormann, a convicted political murderer, Nazi insurance fund guru, and administrative workhorse. As Hess receded into the background after 1934, he was content to let Bormann help the Führer run both his official and personal lives for over a decade.

Bormann was Hitler's go-to man for everything, from giving his girlfriend her allowance to supervising all construction on Hitler's Holy Mountain in the Bavarian Alps; from paying all bills to keeping his cars humming. A tree that blocked Hitler's view one afternoon simply disappeared by the next morning.

When the Führer abolished the post of Deputy Führer, Bormann succeeded his former boss as chief of the Nazi Party Chancellery. Two years later, Bormann was named secretary to the Führer, another of Hess's former posts, and in this capacity became the gatekeeper through whom all who wished to see the Führer must pass.

Bormann thus wielded enormous accrued powers as long as Hitler lived, even sup-

planting him as the real domestic dictator of Germany for the entire war. Prior to 1933, Bormann had founded the NSKK/Nazi Motor Corps that trained drivers for the Reich's armored division tanks and motorized units trucks.

As Reich leader and party minister in effect, all of Germany's Gauleiters, or regional leaders, reported to Bormann via telex and telegraph. Along with Propaganda Minister Josef Goebbels and others, Bormann spearheaded the party's drive against Germany's churches of all denominations until Hitler decided to postpone their ultimate fate until after the war.

By 1945, no one was really sure who was issuing Hitler's domestic and wartime military orders. Did Hitler really order Göring shot by the SS in April 1945? In turn, Göring resolved to have Bormann shot as soon as he could. Bormann was tried in absentia at Nuremberg, convicted, and sentenced to hang for his signing of both anti-Allied POW orders and those to kill the Jews and others.

After Hitler's death, Bormann remained

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Hitler's secretary Martin Bormann chats with the Führer as the two walk together. After Hess departed, Bormann assumed the role of party secretary and controlled access to Hitler. His fate remained a mystery for years after World War II.

as party minister but fled from the Reich Chancellery air raid shelter into the maw of crumbling Berlin as the Red Army occupied the Nazi capital. Either killed by Red gunfire or cyanide capsule, or both, his buried corpse was not discovered until 1972, and not conclusively identified via DNA until 1998. The ashes were strewn in the Baltic Sea on August 16, 1999. In that sense, the crafty Bormann “outlived” them all.

Like Hess, Bormann had a home outside Munich, and also like Göring and Speer, a summer home at Berchtesgaden, so situated that he could see from his window who was entering and leaving Hitler’s Berghof. For Bormann, it was all about control.

### HEINRICH HIMMLER

Heinrich Himmler did not reach the first tier of German leadership until the war was essentially lost after Stalingrad in early 1943, when Hitler named him German interior minister in a cabinet that had not met for years.

Prior to that, Himmler had expanded the SS from a few hundred men to hundreds of thousands, unified Göring’s former concentration camps, and become chief of the German police in 1936, despite having no training and never having walked a beat as a cop himself.

His first big moment came in 1929, when Hitler named him as the second head of the SS with the title of Reichsführer. As police chief of Munich in 1933, his second major opportunity came when he, Göring, and Reinhard Heydrich plotted the takedown of the SA during the Blood Purge of 1934. The third was when he was allowed to arm his first Waffen SS unit in 1938. By 1944, the military wing of the SS numbered fully 38 infantry and armored divisions, as Germany’s fourth branch of armed forces.

Himmler’s next opportunity to achieve more power occurred when Hitler commissioned him to carry out the organized murder of an estimated six million Jews, Gypsies, and other Nazi-termed racial undesirables, coupled with the death by starvation of millions of captured Red Army POWs during 1941-1942.

After the failed attempt to kill Hitler on



**SS chief Heinrich Himmler, perhaps the most ruthless of all Nazi lieutenants, stands with Hitler as the two observe German troop maneuvers. Himmler was captured by the British after the war and chose death by cyanide rather than imprisonment and trial for war crimes.**

July 20, 1944, Himmler realized yet another of his long cherished dreams: to become an Army commander himself. By stages he commanded the Home or Reserve Army, then Army Group Upper Rhine in the west, and finally Army Group Vistula in the east in an ever upward march to power.

The military commands were Himmler’s first undoing, though, as he simply could not defeat the steamrolling Red Army advance into eastern Germany, signaling his first failure in Hitler’s eyes.

Secretly, Himmler tried to cover up his own participation in the Holocaust by exhuming bodies and burning them. He then turned outright traitor by attempting to negotiate an end to the war via Sweden and the release of the still-living Jews through the World Jewish Congress in the spring of 1945.

When Himmler’s infidelity came to light, Hitler had the SS liaison in Berlin, General Hermann Fegelein, executed and issued orders for the execution of Himmler as well. Himmler escaped, however, went to ground, and was captured by the British in northern Germany in May 1945. He committed suicide, crunching down on a cyanide cap-

sule during a British medical exam.

Stated one his captors, "We immediately upended the old bastard and got his mouth into a bowl of water that was there to wash the poison out. There were terrible groans and grunts coming from the swine.... It was a losing battle, and the evil thing breathed his last."

Like his friend and ally Bormann, Himmler also maintained two households. The first was with his wife since 1928, Margarete Boden Himmler, by whom he had a still living daughter, Gudrun, born in 1929. The second was with his much younger office secretary, Hedwig Potthast, nicknamed Bunny, who bore him a son in 1942 and a daughter in 1944. He and his wife also adopted a boy who joined the SS.

### **JOACHIM VON RIBBENTROP**

Lampooned by British diplomats who knew him as the pompous Brickendrop, a play on his last name, Joachim von Ribbentrop was perhaps the most personally disliked German leader with the possible exception of Bormann.

Oddly, both his greatest diplomatic achievement, the non-aggression pact with Russia in August 1939, and most spectacular failure, wrongly convincing Hitler that Great Britain would not go to war over Poland in September of that year, came within 10 days of one another.

Prior to that, Ribbentrop had successfully negotiated an unexpected naval agreement with England in 1935, flopped badly as German ambassador to London during 1936-1938, been named German foreign minister, and then basically frozen out of the Munich Pact conference by Göring in 1938. He went on to gain Hitler's long-sought military alliance with Fascist Italy in May 1939.

Hitler had sent Ribbentrop to London with the ringing charge, "Ribbentrop, bring me the British alliance!" but his most famous gaffe was to render a Nazi salute to King George V as the latter walked toward him to shake hands. Thereafter, his British mission was all downhill, and yet he hoodwinked Hitler into believing that the British monarchy and aristocracy were both pro-Nazi when he knew the opposite to be true. He hated the British for jilting him and thus reportedly wanted a world war to destroy them.

How did a former champagne salesman become Bismarck's successor at the Foreign Office? First, he impressed Hitler as a knowledgeable world traveler whose trips included all of Europe, Canada, and the United States. More to the point, however, it was Ribbentrop who volunteered his swanky Dahlem mansion in the Berlin suburbs as the secret meeting place in January 1933 between Hitler and Ribbentrop's friend and former Chancellor Franz von Papen, that resulted in the Nazi Führer being named Reich Chancellor.

Hitler never forgot it. Ribbentrop's future at the Foreign Office was also smoothed when several other top Nazis tried and failed to garner the results Hitler wanted from Germany's neighbors, including Alfred Rosenberg, Goebbels, and even Göring, one after the other.

In effect, Ribbentrop won his position both by default and with his early successes prior to 1938. Thus, he survived virtually the entire war as Hitler's second foreign minister, although fired as redundant in Hitler's 1945 Last Will and Political Testament.

Ribbentrop's crowning glory, the pact with Russia, was undone when Hitler invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, but every chance he got, Ribbentrop tried to restore it with the man he both liked and admired—Josef Stalin. Failing that, during 1940-1943 he achieved a series of smaller pacts with the Reich's Eastern European aligned states, all of which fell away during 1943-1945, as it became ever clearer that Hitler had lost the war.

The fact that Ribbentrop plotted aggressive wars during his early tenure as foreign minister, broke treaties he had personally signed, and then willingly aided the Holocaust by encouraging foreign deportations to the death camps combined to win him the hangman's noose at Nuremberg in 1946.



**ABOVE:** Heinrich Himmler, leader of the dreaded SS, photographed in 1933. Himmler was obedient to Hitler until the last days of the Third Reich, when he attempted to reach out to the Western Allies to save his own skin. **BETWEEN:** Nazi Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop was a former champagne salesman and described by many as inept in the role of diplomat. His crowning achievement was the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact of 1939.



### **JOSEF GOEBBELS**

Failed pre-Nazi novelist, playwright, reporter, and bank teller Josef Goebbels nonetheless was awarded his doctorate in German literature and also had studied history at four major Reich universities



ABOVE: Hitler and Propaganda Minister Josef Goebbels talk during a walk at Hitler's Eagle's Nest retreat in Bavaria on April 12, 1943. Two years later both men were dead. Goebbels had shaped the perspective of the German people for years with lies and half truths. LEFT: Josef Goebbels congratulates a young soldier who has displayed heroism in combat. As Nazi fortunes waned in the last months of World War II, the Nazis sent boys as young as 12 into battle against the Western Allies and the marauding Soviet Red Army.

before becoming the premier political public relations man in world advertising history by 1939.

As such, he was also recognized as the Nazi Party's best orator after Hitler, shared equally his Führer's hatred of Jews, and freely admitted in his now fully published 32-volume diaries of 1923-1945 that the regime was openly exterminating every single Semite it could.

As Nazi Propaganda Minister for most of the regime's existence, Goebbels became the unlikely major domo in charge of the German media, print, audio, and film, as well as of the book publishing industry, art, culture, domestic Winter Relief funds, music, and the stage, except in Göring's Prussia, where the man who married an actress kept that state's theater as his own fiefdom.

Like Bormann, Goebbels waged war against the Reich's religious establishment, tried unsuccessfully to pry foreign propaganda away from Ribbentrop, and agreed with Bormann that the defeated Reich needed total war in 1943.

Like Göring, Goebbels opposed both war with the West in 1939 and against Russia in 1941, pressed for the firing of

Ribbentrop, unsuccessfully urged a separate peace on Hitler, and even succeeded his late Führer as Reich Chancellor for one day in 1945.

Goebbels' main wartime assignment was to ensure that there was no second 1918-like collapse of the German home front, and in this he succeeded beyond all expectations. Indeed, it took several major foreign armies invading the Reich simultaneously to overthrow the Nazi regime, which was supported to the end and beyond by the German people.

As with the dead Hitlers, Adolf and the former Eva Braun, the bodies of all the slain Goebbels were found by the Russians in Berlin, those of the children completely unmarked and still in their nightgowns. Although badly charred, those of the parents were recognizable.

Reportedly, the remains were "burned, crushed, and scattered into the Bideritz River, a tributary of the nearby Elbe River," site of the linkup of the Eastern and Western Allied armies in April 1945.

### ALBERT SPEER

Albert Speer, as the major German wartime Minister of Armaments and War Production, has been credited by some historians with prolonging World War II by a full year.

The naked statistics were, indeed, impressive. During 1943 alone, tank production more than doubled, aircraft output rose by 80 percent, and submarines rolled off assembly lines in but two months as opposed to the previous year-long factory time. This stellar record continued into late 1944, by which time German industry had produced enough weaponry to field a whopping 270 more ground divisions, although the reeling Reich had enough men for only 150. Further, in 1945, the Luftwaffe had more planes than it did trained pilots or the necessary oil to fuel them.

Speer, a trained third-generation architect by profession, was both given and took full credit for what was termed then and now a production miracle. In reality, and as this author discovered during research for a dual biography of both Speer and his predecessor, highway engineer Dr. Fritz Todt, Speer did not deserve all those laurels, although both Hitler and Goebbels were convinced that he did.

In fact, Speer put into place a system that Dr. Todt had developed before his sudden death in an airplane crash on February 8, 1942. In addition, Speer's other "reforms" consisted mainly of taking production decisions away from incompetent party hacks installed by Göring during 1936-1942 under his Four Year Plan and returning them to the professionally trained members of big business and heavy industry, who then got the job done.

That was the Speer miracle in an unvarnished nutshell. He simply followed an old political axiom: "If it happens on your watch, take credit for it." During 1931-1942, Speer held a variety of top architectural posts, first within the party to 1933, and thereafter as an appointed technocrat, state secretary in the Reich cabinet, and as an appointed member of the Reichstag. He sat on the government bench alongside his two previous Nazi employers, Goebbels and Hess.

When the war was lost and Hitler was dead, Speer morphed into a presidential cabinet member, named by Hitler's successor Admiral Karl Dönitz as minister of economics. Knowing this was but a temporary post, Speer made his real goal that of working to rebuild the shattered Fourth Reich for the Allies and then assisting with the organization of the future Allied client state that occupied Germany became in 1949.

By then, however, he had miscalculated, had been convicted of war crimes, and had been sentenced to 20 years in prison. Released in 1966 at age 61, he reinvented himself yet again, this time as the "Good Nazi," a global bestselling author and memoirist, TV personality, and elder statesman, until he suffered a stroke in London in 1981 in the arms of his German-English mistress.

Historians have overlooked what may well prove to be Speer's lasting legacy, namely that wars cannot be won via airpower alone but must be accompanied by an occupying army of boots on the ground. His production miracles took place during devastating Allied wartime bombing raids that destroyed Nazi Germany's cities and factories. Speer simply moved the factories underground and went on.

Speer built Hitler's North-South Axis thoroughfare in Berlin in 1939, but it was not

National Archives



Nazi Minister of Armaments Albert Speer discusses plans for a new administration building for the provincial government in the city of Weimar in 1936. Speer was mesmerized by Hitler and considered him a personal friend.

until the 2008 Beijing Olympics that its companion East-West Axis was constructed in Communist China by his namesake and fourth-generation architectural successor, Albert Speer, Jr.

### **WILHELM KEITEL**

Hitler launched his invasion of Poland in 1939 with four of his top soldiers all hailing from the German Army's artillery branch: Wilhelm Keitel, Alfred Jodl, Walther Warlimont, and their Chief of General Staff Colonel General Franz Halder.

Of this talented quartet, without doubt Wilhelm Keitel has come down in martial history as the most maligned, as Hitler's *lakeitel*, a play on words of his last name that in German means "lackey."

For this alleged subservience to his Führer, Keitel alone of all the former generals granted field marshals' batons by Hitler on July 19, 1940, was the sole recipient who had not been rewarded for leading armies in the field. He was acutely aware of this, noting in his jail cell memoirs written during the weeks between his sentencing and execution at Nuremberg, "The only troops I commanded during the war were the sentries posted at my gate" at headquarters.

He also asserted with validity that he had a thankless task that none other in the German High Command wanted. In early 1938, Hitler asked War Minister Field Marshal Werner von Blomberg who this General Keitel was. Blomberg answered, "He's only the man who manages my office!" The Führer piped right up with, "That's exactly the man I want!"

Ironically, Keitel's goal in life was to manage his landed family's country estate, but his father disagreed, so he joined the Imperial Army instead in 1901. In 1909, Keitel married Lisa Fontaine, another landowner's daughter, and they had six children, including two sons killed in the World War II.

After being badly wounded by a shell fragment in his right arm in the Flanders campaign, then Captain Keitel became a staff officer, taking part in the Battles of the Marne, Verdun, and Passchendaele. By

1924, he was posted to the Defense Ministry in Berlin with the thinly disguised postwar general staff's cover name of Troop Office.

In this capacity, he traveled to the Soviet Union, where he inspected secret German Army training camps and in 1937 was promoted to colonel general. His first act as Hitler's OKW chief was to undermine the Führer's choice to replace Army commander Baron Werner von Fritsch with the too pro-Nazi General Walter von Reichenau. Instead, Keitel persuaded Hitler to name as commander-in-chief his own candidate and friend, Walter von Brauchitsch.

Under Keitel's aegis, the armed forces won the great initial wartime victories of 1939-1942, but he helped place the future hangman's noose around his own neck by co-signing several of his Führer's criminal orders. These included the Commissar Order that mandated that all Red Army political officers be shot upon capture, the Night and Fog Decree that called for the

"disappearance" of resistance fighters and political prisoners, and another that resulted in captured French pilots being executed rather than treated as POWs.

Despised within the services as Hitler's servile yes man, Keitel was nonetheless respected by his deputy, Colonel General Alfred Jodl, as "the great K," for the hard task he managed during a war that was essentially lost by 1944.

Keitel's plea at Nuremberg that he was only following orders in agreeing officially to these war crimes was rejected by the Allied prosecution, and he was duly hanged. His postwar memoirs are among the best, portraying the same point of view as the majority of his fellow field marshals.

### ALFRED JODL

Keitel's deputy, Colonel General Alfred Jodl, unlike his boss, had many famous run-ins with Hitler, on whom Keitel in 1940 bestowed the acronym GROFAZ, or the Greatest Field Lord of All Time. Like Keitel, Jodl also had been wounded in the Great War.

Jodl felt that Hitler was both a great war leader and gifted statesman, but he stood his ground when he felt that the Führer was wrong.

One of these occasions occurred in the spring of 1940, when Hitler panicked and wanted to withdraw German mountain troops from Norway before they were captured by the British in what looked like a failed military operation. Jodl talked him out of it, and the eventual victory in France made the Norwegian venture a success by default.

Jodl signed the same criminal orders as Keitel, including Hitler's Commando Order to have Allied undercover warriors shot upon capture, and for these, he, too, was hanged in 1946.

A widower of the late Countess Irma von Bullion Jodl, Alfred's second wife was their

Cosmeo



ABOVE: Adolf Hitler

National Archives



ABOVE: Wilhelm Keitel served as Hitler's primary military adviser and was viewed by many German officers as merely a yes man. In this photo he is signing the instrument of surrender to the Soviets in Berlin. Keitel was hanged as a war criminal at Nuremberg. LEFT: Colonel General Alfred Jodl served as chief of staff at senior German Army headquarters in Berlin. He signed the surrender documents to the Western Allies in Reims, France, and was later hanged at Nuremberg for war crimes.



**Hitler rides in a small boat with Grand Admiral Erich Raeder, commander of the German Navy, or Kriegsmarine. Raeder fell out of favor with the Führer and was later replaced by Admiral Karl Dönitz.**

mutual friend, Luise von Benda, who aided his lawyer in the general's defense before the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg.

The late U.S. Army physician John K. Lattimer, whom this author met at a Nuremberg staff reunion in Washington, D.C., in 1991, said of Jodl, "Now, there is a man, the only one who had anything constructive to say, even if it meant his own death ... Jodl went ... without a complaint, exactly as everyone knew he would."

In 1953, a West German court ruled that the dead Jodl had not violated international law, a ruling that was quickly revoked a few months later by a Bavarian government minister. It was a political decision.

### **ERICH RAEDER**

Once Hitler wryly told Jodl, "I have a reactionary army, a Christian navy, and a Nazi air force!" The man at whom this remark was aimed was one of his two personally promoted grand admirals, Dr. Erich Raeder, the onetime commanding officer of Kaiser Wilhelm II's personal yacht, the *Hohenzollern*.

Having known both leaders personally, Raeder had nothing but fond memories of his former monarch in his 1960 memoirs, and despite being fired by the Führer harshly and abruptly in 1943, still praised him as "a man born to command."

Young Raeder joined the embryonic Imperial Navy in 1894 and soon became a lifelong devotee of battleships, being named chief of staff to Admiral Franz Hipper in 1912. Two years later, the formerly small maritime force had become the mighty Imperial High Seas Fleet ready to challenge the great British Royal Navy in surface combat.

Prior to that, Raeder married the first of two wives and fathered three children. Speaking fluent Russian, as well as French and English, Raeder was on hand to observe the defeat of the Russian Navy in the Far East during the 1904-1905 Russo-Japanese War. The next year, he became public relations director for the founder of the fleet, Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz.

Returning to Hipper's wartime command, Raeder witnessed firsthand the 1915 Battle

of the Dogger Bank and the 1916 Battle of Jutland against his foe in both world wars, the Royal Navy. He emerged from the war still an advocate of a future combined battleship-cruiser surface fleet, as opposed to a lesser cruiser-submarine arm that might better use Germany's then limited naval building resources.

Raeder ended the Great War as deputy to the Naval State Secretary, by which time he had committed to building 450 U-boats. Having lost two younger brothers in the war, Raeder seethed for a future rematch with the victorious Allies.

In 1920, Raeder and most of the naval officer corps sided with the failed Kapp Revolt that tried to restore the kaiser to his throne, but his career advanced nonetheless. In 1928, he became the German republic's commander in chief of a much smaller navy. Thereafter, he kept the fleet aloof from politics but welcomed Hitler and the Nazis in 1933.

The disastrous naval campaign against the Royal Navy in Norwegian waters in 1940 was an operation that Raeder had convinced Hitler to undertake, after being given his baton as grand admiral on April 1, 1939, to forestall a planned retirement. The German surface fleet suffered heavy losses and never again counted as a real force in the war. Yet Hitler retained Raeder in office.

A second campaign in May 1941 also ended in disaster when the Royal Navy sank the battleship *Bismarck* after losing the battlecruiser HMS *Hood*. Raeder's famed Channel Dash of early 1942, with surface units successfully sneaking by the Royal Navy, restored his standing with Hitler. This was totally destroyed, though, when Raeder lost the February 1943 Battle of the Barents Sea, for which his irked Führer finally fired him, kicking Raeder upstairs to the honorary post of Inspector General of the Navy.

More serious, though, was Hitler's threat to mothball the entire German surface fleet, removing its heavy gun turrets for projected shore battery usage along the new Atlantic Wall to prevent the coming

*Continued on page 98*

# THE KILLING SQUAD

BY BLAINE TAYLOR

## The Nazi Einsatzgruppen began the war's most closely guarded operation, the annihilation of the Jews.

The wide-scale murder of Jews by Nazi Germany began in Poland In September 1939, protested only by German Army Generals Johannes Blaskowitz and Georg Kuchler.

Indeed, in some cases the Army even aided the Death's Head units of the SS in the Polish campaign by killing Jews under the thin guise that they were, in fact, enemy partisans operating behind the German lines. This stratagem would be vastly expanded when the Soviet Union was invaded on June 22, 1941, the rule being, "Where there is a Jew, there is a partisan; where there is a partisan, there is a Jew."

In the Soviet Union, the killing escalated as SS General Reinhard Heydrich, head of the RSHA (Reich Security Main Office), established, organized, and dispatched to the Baltic Republics and Western Russia six major units attached to the German Army for the specific purpose of killing what he termed "hostile elements," above all, the Jews.

These so-called Einsatzgruppen (Special Task Forces) were commanded in the field by young, motivated, highly educated soldiers who in civilian life were lawyers, and their ranks consisted of members of Heydrich's Sicherheitsdienst (Security Service, or SD), the overall General SS, the Nazi Party's Storm Troopers(SA), the German State Regular Police, and later combat troops from the Waffen SS Death's Head and Wiking Divisions.



A mother clutches her child near Ivangorod, Ukraine, as a German soldier takes aim at close range. The rifles of additional German soldiers, members of the Einsatzgruppen execution squads, are visible at left.

Immediately after the war and for many decades thereafter, various German veterans' organizations falsely denied that the combat arm of the SS had anything at all to do with atrocities known to have been carried out by their organizational cousins in the dreaded Einsatzgruppen.

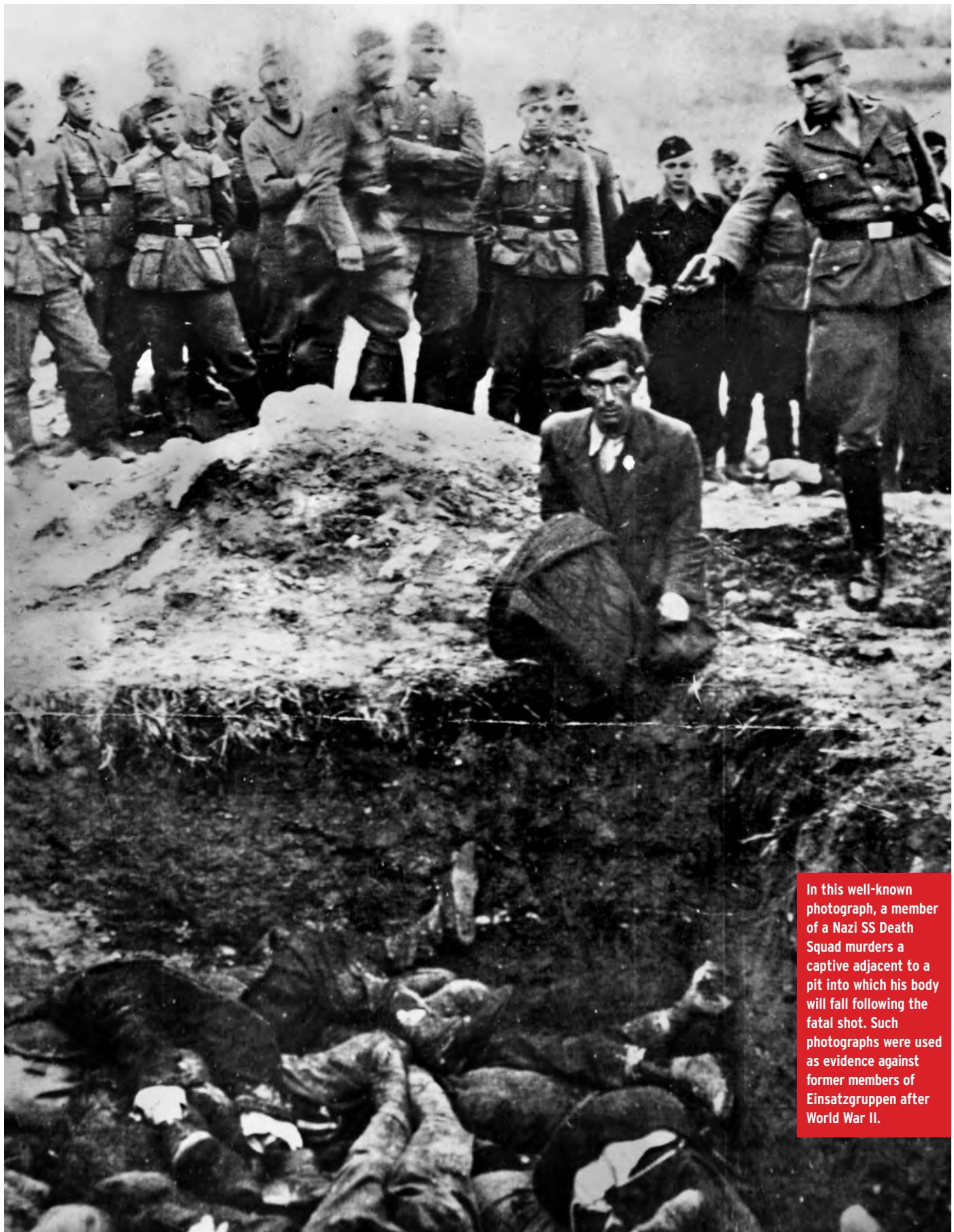
Mobilized initially during the 1939 Polish Campaign, the major heinous activities perpetrated by the Einsatzgruppen occurred during 1941-1942 with the outright murder of hundreds of thousands of Soviet Jews in both Russia and Ukraine.

Working closely with the local police and the native non-Jewish populations, the German Order Police jointly served as the primary moving force of the Nazi Final Solution of the Jewish Question in Europe prior to the establishment of the more infamous death camp extermination combines.

And that was not all, either. Besides Jews, and often assisted directly by the local police of the invaded territories, the Nazi Einsatzgruppen murdered gypsies, homosexuals, and Communist Party officials.

Together, the locals and their invaders rounded up entire populations of occupied towns, executing them by shooting and then throwing their bodies into pits that served as mass graves.

Tiring of this time-consuming, costly, and emotionally draining effort, the



In this well-known photograph, a member of a Nazi SS Death Squad murders a captive adjacent to a pit into which his body will fall following the fatal shot. Such photographs were used as evidence against former members of Einsatzgruppen after World War II.



**ABOVE:** In a chilling photo that provides documented evidence of Nazi atrocities on the Eastern Front during World War II, German soldiers fire into a pit as they execute Russian civilians.

**RIGHT:** Placed on trial for war crimes in 1947, former SS officer Otto Ohlendorf listens to court proceedings. Ohlendorf was sentenced to death and later executed.



killers soon deployed gas vans, sealed truck passenger compartments into which the vehicles' fumes were diverted, to kill their prisoners while in transit from one spot to another.

Originally, Heydrich organized his Einsatzgruppen into six units that would eventually encompass some 20,000 men and women. Each unit included Waffen SS, motorcycle riders, administrators, SD personnel, criminal police, state police, auxiliary police, regular police, female secretaries and clerks, interpreters, and teletype and radio operators. These units were, in effect, completely mobile, and self-contained.

In addition, at a time when the regular German Army was only partially mobilized in June 1941, with much of its field artillery still being horse drawn, Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler, leader of the SS, ensured that his individual killing units were fully mobile with a complement of 180 trucks each. The troops themselves were well armed with either rifles or automatic weapons.

Himmler and Heydrich, acting on the direct orders of German Chancellor Adolf Hitler verbally and Reich Marshal Hermann Göring in writing in July 1941, fully intended to kill not only Jews, but also 25 to 30 million Slavs all the way to the far-off Ural Mountains in Soviet Asia. This would clear the vast grassland steppes for future German colonization.

At first, during June-July 1941, the SS

members themselves were not fully and closely involved in the killings, instead encouraging the local populations of the invaded territories to kill their own Jews in alleged spontaneous uprisings that they both aided and abetted.

Indeed, to further enflame these locals the Germans opened up all the communist jails and displayed the dead left behind by the retreating Red Army political commissars, blaming these grisly killings on the Jews.

But even as they were actively encouraging these domestic killings and also participating in them, the SS nonetheless nervously approached their gory tasks. One SS man remembered, "We all said to one another, 'What on earth would happen if we lost the war and had to pay for all this?'"

This was precisely the problem that General Blaskowitz had identified in German-occupied Poland in the fall of 1939 and that Himmler encountered as well. As the direct result of the brutal mass killings, moral depravity was spreading through the SS like an epidemic. Einsatzgruppen commanders were losing their minds and being relieved of duty, while the men who actually performed the shootings were becoming alcoholics and experiencing emotional distress.

At one such action on September 15, 1941, fully 12,000 people were formed by the police into marching columns and sent down a street toward a local airport, with the small children and elderly being trucked.

Upon reaching the airfield, all the prisoners were duly marched across an open meadow about 50 yards to an open pit. They were then murdered with automatic weapons with the killing lasted a full day.

On a single day, September 22, 1941, the Einsatzgruppen slaughtered 10,000 people in one such action.

One of their commanders, Artur Nebe, was the first to experiment with the mobile gas vans. This was done not to kill more humanely, but rather as a means of making the killing more bearable for the executioners. Because pure carbon monoxide was found to be too expensive to use in this way, Nebe decided to experiment with the vehicles' own automobile exhaust fumes instead. These, in turn, led to the stationary and ever larger death camp chambers beginning in mid-1942, where the killing took place on an overwhelming scale until late 1944.

Even though the crematoria and gas chambers of the Nazi death camps have come to be grimly iconic of the Holocaust, they were, according to some sources, exceptional, and not the standard killing method.

If Slavs are counted among the victims of the Holocaust along with Jews and gypsies, then shooting accounted for far more deaths than gas. The van gassing began late in 1941, and the camps became operational afterward.

The men of the Einsatzgruppen obeyed their dire orders willingly, if uneasily, for

no judges looked over their shoulders, at least not during the war. They were also told that they acted on the direct orders of their Führer, the Supreme Justice of the German State, making them “judge, jury, and executioner” all rolled into one.

The German Armed Forces, when not directly involved, simply looked away.

The catastrophic defeat and surrender of the German Sixth Army at Stalingrad in early 1943 put all Nazi plans for colonization of the East on hold, but the murder of the Jews continued unabated.

However, that same year it was felt prudent to disband the Einsatzgruppen and take steps to cover up what had been done. One who did not advocate this reversal of policy was Hitler, and in June 1943 the continued killing of the Jews became a more important political war than winning the military conflict it had engendered.

Hitler and Himmler committed suicide a few weeks apart, leaving behind their bloody minions to pay for the deeds of the Einsatzgruppen and others.

The military government of the United States in occupied West Germany brought to trial 24 former commanders and officers of the Einsatzgruppen in the ninth of 12 overall war crimes trials held at Nuremberg.

The case of Otto Ohlendorf et al. was heard by a panel of three judges from September 15, 1947, to April 10, 1948, with American Justice Michael A. Musmanno of Philadelphia presiding.

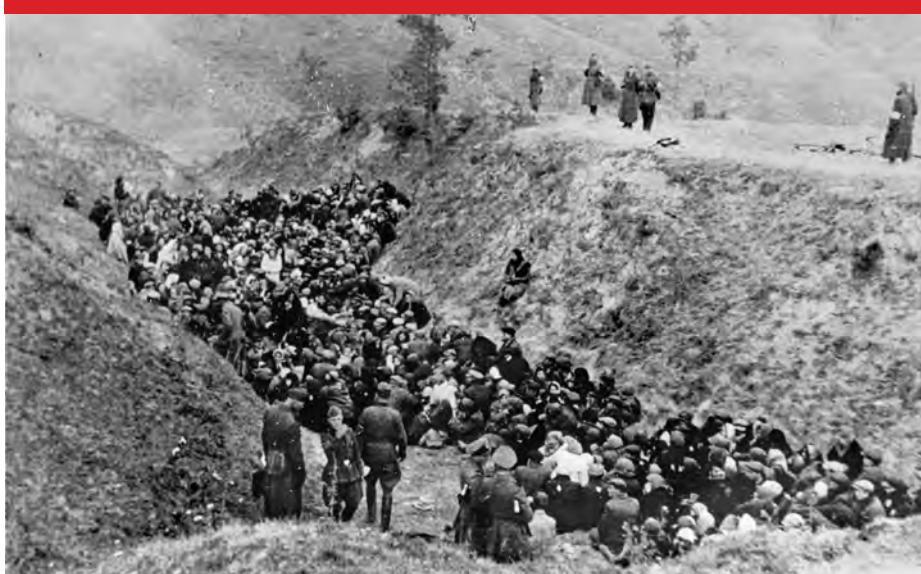
Amazingly, at first there was no such trial planned for the criminals of the notorious Einsatzgruppen, but this changed with the discovery of a single set of its reports that survived the war. It was found on the fourth floor among two tons of other documents at Gestapo headquarters in Berlin in September 1945.

At the first of the trials, the International Military Tribunal of 1945-1946 in Nuremberg, Ohlendorf had let slip in open court testimony that his own Einsatzgruppen D had murdered 90,000 people. It was not until much later, though, that the fuller and much grimmer overall picture emerged via the newly found documents, the Nazis’ records of their deeds.

The 24 accused included Ohlendorf, Heinz Jost, Erich Naumann, Otto Rasch,



ABOVE: One of the most highly publicized Nazi atrocities on the Eastern Front during World War II was the mass murder of approximately 30,000 Jews in the ravine of Babi Yar in Russia.  
BELOW: Herded into a ravine near the Soviet town of Zdolbunov in October 1942, Jewish men, women, and children await execution at the hands of German Einsatzgruppen.



Edwin Schulz, Franz Six, Paul Blobel, Walter Blume, Martin Dandberger, Willy Seibert, Eugen Steimle, Ernst Bilberstein, Werner Braune, Walter Hansch, Gustav Nosske, Adolf Ott, Eduard Strauch, Emil Haussmann, Woldemar Klingelhofer, Lothar Fendler, Waldemar von Radetsky, Heinz Schubert, and Matthias Graf.

Only four of the accused were hanged in 1951, including Ohlendorf. Despite being the sole American prosecution witness in

other trials, he was eventually executed after many appeals to superior courts in the United States had been denied.

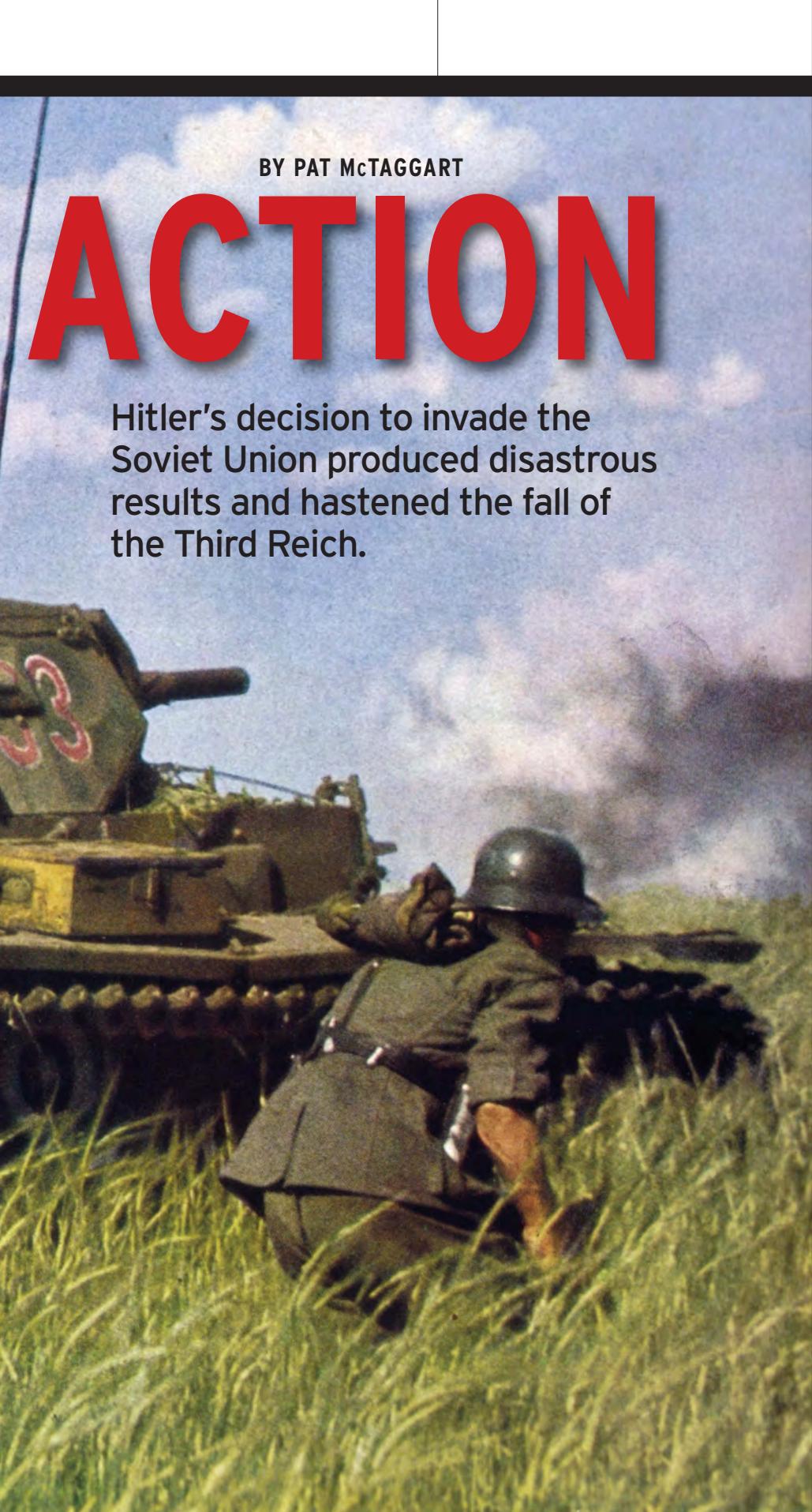
Amazingly, few of the remaining guilty perpetrators were either indicted or convicted, much less confined or hanged for their nefarious crimes against humanity.

Conversely, Artur Nebe was reportedly a “broken” man by November 1941, writing, “I’ve looked after so many criminals, and now I’ve become one myself.” □

# A FATAL ATTR



Advancing across the Russian steppe in September 1941, German soldiers take cover behind a PzKpfw II tank. The PzKpfw II was still in wide use when the Wehrmacht invaded Russia on June 22, 1941. However, it rapidly fell into obsolescence and was relegated to noncombat roles.



BY PAT McTAGGART

# ACTION

**Hitler's decision to invade the Soviet Union produced disastrous results and hastened the fall of the Third Reich.**

**O**N JUNE 22, 1941, ADOLF HITLER unleashed his armies against the Soviet Union in an operation known as Barbarossa. Less than four years later, after the deaths of millions of soldiers and civilians and the displacement of millions more, the war was over. The Wehrmacht was defeated, Hitler was dead, and his Thousand Year Reich was in shambles.

Many historians have called the attack on the Soviet Union Hitler's greatest blunder. However, it was almost inevitable that the conflict of the two countries would take place. In Hitler's mind, the Soviet Union represented his most dangerous enemy. He also had philosophic, economic, and military reasons, some of them going back more than 20 years, to commit his armed forces to the attack.

One of his principal reasons for the attack was his long held belief in Lebensraum (living space). The concept of living space was nothing new to the Germanic people. Beginning with the early Middle Ages the Germanic people had relieved the pressure of overpopulation by founding settlements in Eastern Europe and Russia, and as the German Army moved across the Soviet Union during the early years of World War II it came upon towns and even whole regions where German was the primary language with Russian being the secondary one.

The 1918 Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, signed by the Bolsheviks, ceded vast tracts of land to the German Empire from the Baltic through Belarus and the Ukraine and down to the Caucasus. When World War I ended German newspapers showed maps of the German situation in the East. Hitler must surely have seen these maps, which indicated German troops holding a line from the Baltic Sea to the Crimea and Transcaucasia. The 1919 Treaty of Versailles forced the new German government to give up those lands, but in Hitler's mind those maps would become the basis of the "Greater German Reich."

As Hitler rose on the stage of German politics, one of his principal points was the repudiation of the Treaty of Versailles. He not only wanted German lands lost by



National Archives

**ABOVE:** The Führer offers a stiff Nazi salute to troops of the 1st SS Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler, the SS formation that began as his personal bodyguard and grew to division strength as World War II progressed. This photo was taken on January 30, 1937, when the Leibstandarte was at regimental strength. **OPPOSITE:** On February 19, 1943, Hitler meets with his commanders at the Eastern Front headquarters of Army Group South. At the Führer's right is Field Marshal Erich von Manstein, one of his most capable strategic and tactical commanders.

border revisions in the treaty, but the addition of the lands still held in the East when the war ended. In his rambling autobiographical book *Mein Kampf* he devoted an entire chapter to the German need for Lebensraum. Several phrases in the book and in his speeches make it clear that Lebensraum would be the major foreign policy objective of the National Socialists and the Third Reich.

One of his most telling declarations laid out his plans for anyone who bothered to listen. "We National Socialists consciously draw a line beneath the foreign policy tendency of our prewar period. We take up where we broke off six hundred years ago. We stop the endless German movement to the south and west, and turn our gaze toward the land in the east. At long last, we break off the colonial and commercial

policy of the prewar period and shift to the soil policy of the future."

Included in the Lebensraum policy was a bitter pathological seed of racism that categorized Slavs and Jews as "subhuman." There would be no room in the Greater German Reich for such people.

"The Völkish State must under no conditions annex Poland with the intention of wanting to make Germans out of them someday," he stated. "On the contrary, it must muster the determination either to seal off these alien racial elements, so that the blood of its own Folk will not be corrupted again, or it must, without further ado, remove them and hand over the vacated territory to its own National Comrades."

The same thing extended to the Soviet Union. At Hitler's first meeting with generals and admirals on February 3, 1933, he stated, "The conquest of Lebensraum in Eastern Europe, and its ruthless Germanization, were the ultimate geopolitical objectives of Reich foreign policy."

The USSR would give Germans sufficient Lebensraum because of its agricultural land mass and because Slavic subhumans, controlled by Jewish Bolshevism, populated the area. He envisioned resettling Germans in the conquered areas of the Soviet Union, which would include all of western Russia, and deporting most of the Slavic population to Siberia while keeping some to use as slave labor on farms and in factories. As late as 1943, Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler declared that the Ural Mountains would be the eastern border of the Reich.

For Hitler, communism and an "international Jewish conspiracy" were intertwined. Karl Marx, author of the *Communist Manifesto*, was Jewish. Therefore, in Hitler's mind the Bolshevik Revolution and the creation of the Soviet state were the result of a Jewish-controlled quest for world domination.

As the world plunged into economic depression in 1929, the growth of the National Socialist and Communist Parties increased. There were riots in the streets, and Hitler used the opportunity to combine the communists and Jews into one enemy that the people could identify with. In one of his speeches he said, "The streets of our country are in turmoil. The universities are filled with students rebelling and rioting. Communists are seeking to destroy our country. Russia is threatening us with her might and the republic

is in danger. Yes—danger from within and without. We need law and order! Without it our nation cannot survive."

After he was named chancellor of Germany, Hitler continued to step up his anti-communist rhetoric. In a May 10, 1933, speech he said, "For 14 or 15 years I have continually proclaimed to the German nation that I regard it my task before posterity to destroy Marxism, and that is no empty phrase but a solemn oath which I shall follow as long as I live.... This for us is not a fight which can be finished by compromise."

Hitler kept his attacks on the Soviet Union going into the late 1930s. A September 14, 1936, speech in Nuremberg was typical. "I can come to no terms with Bolshevism," he said. "Bolshevism turns flourishing countrysides into sinister wastes of ruin.... Since I have fought against these Jewish Soviet ideas in Germany, since I have conquered and stamped out this peril, I fancy that I possess a better comprehension of its character than do men who have only at best had to deal with it in the field of literature."

After the death of President Paul von Hindenburg, Hitler assumed total power in Germany and Hitler began to move quickly. On March 7, 1936, he ordered German troops to enter the Rhineland, which was not only against the Versailles Treaty but a violation of the Locarno Pact that Germany had signed in 1925.

The Locarno Pact was designed to allow French troops access to the Ruhr industrial centers. Hitler's generals knew that if the French reacted, the small force sent into the Rhineland stood no chance if a battle should break out, and many of them warned against the action. To the surprise of many, the French did nothing, giving Hitler confidence that he knew more than his generals did.

By early 1938 Hitler had control over the German Army. On March 12, 1938, he ordered his troops into Austria, where they were met by cheering crowds. Czechoslovakia was next. Once again the West backed down, and on September 30, 1938, the infamous Munich Agreement was signed. The agreement, which Hitler later called a "scrap of paper," basi-

cally stripped Czechoslovakia of its natural border defenses by giving the Sudetenland back to Germany. On March 15, 1939, Hitler ordered the German Army to occupy the rest of Czechoslovakia.

All of these successes had a price. The increase in the size of the German military and the production of ships, aircraft, and tanks were draining the German economy. Ever since Hitler had assumed power, his government had spent more than it had taken in. In 1936, military spending was higher than in any other European country.

Germany lacked reserves in raw materials. In 1939, the country imported 33 percent of its raw materials and was 40 billion Reichsmarks in debt. Prices of manufactured goods, Germany's principal exports, had fallen while imported raw material prices had increased. However, the economic drain did not stop the military expansion. "The extent of the military development of our resources cannot be too large, nor its pace too swift," Hitler stated.

With Czechoslovakia now firmly under German control, Hitler turned his eyes to





On June 22, 1941, the day Operation Barbarossa was launched, a column of German PzKpfw. IV and PzKpfw. II tanks pauses during its dash across the Russian frontier and deep into the vast country in the East. The initial German successes surpassed the expectations of even the most optimistic Barbarossa planners as thousands of Soviet troops were killed or cut off and captured.

Poland. There was a sizable German minority in Poland, and the creation of the country after World War I had come at the expense of several areas that had once been part of Imperial Germany. Poland also separated the German free city of Danzig from East Prussia. Combined with Hitler's hatred of the Slavs, Poland became an automatic target.

There were several problems to be faced if Poland was to fall. France and Britain had guaranteed its sovereignty, but after seeing them back down during the Rhineland and Czechoslovakia affairs, Hitler had reason to believe that their guarantees were more bluster.

The Soviet Union presented a different problem. Hitler knew that Stalin would not stand idly by if Poland was invaded. To overcome this, he did something he thought to previously be unthinkable. On August 20, 1939, he sent a message to the

Soviet dictator asking if Stalin would meet with German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop in Moscow. Stalin replied that he would.

The day before Hitler sent the message, a commercial agreement was signed between the two countries that would benefit both. It was augmented by a further agreement on February 11, 1940, in which the Soviet Union would send one million tons of grain, 900,000 tons of oil, more than 500,000 tons of metal ores (mainly iron ore), 139,500 tons of cotton, and 300,000 tons of scrap metal among other things. In return, Germany would provide the Soviet Union with manufactured goods and machinery.

Talks had been going on between the two countries since early in 1939. However, Stalin wanted to have an economic agreement signed before a political agreement could be possible.

On August 21, the world was stunned by the announcement of the German-Soviet Non-aggression Pact. Two years earlier, Hitler had called the Soviet Union "the greatest danger for the civilized culture and civilization of mankind which has ever threatened it since the collapse of the ancient world." Now, each of the dictators had made a "deal with the devil" that would allow the world to be plunged into war once again.

On the surface and below the surface, the pact seemed like a good deal for both Hitler and Stalin. The pact stated that there would be no military action against each other for at least 10 years. For Stalin, this would give him time to rebuild his military, which was going through a series of purges that were devastating his officer corps. For Hitler, it would let him invade Poland unopposed.

In other protocols of the pact that were not made public, Hitler and Stalin would divide Poland and Stalin would be free to occupy the Baltic countries of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. Neither side really trusted the other, but neither was yet ready to go to war with the other.

The Polish campaign was an outstanding success for both Hitler and Stalin. While Russia consolidated her gains, Hitler made ready to challenge France and Britain, which had declared war on Germany on September 3, two days after Germany invaded Poland.

His Western campaign brought Hitler a relatively quick victory. By late May the Benelux countries, Denmark, Norway, and France were in German hands. The cam-

paign further solidified his belief in his military instincts. However, he had made some missteps during the fighting, the most serious being letting the better part of the British Army escape at Dunkirk.

Following the disastrous Battle of Britain, Hitler made a fatal decision. On December 18, 1940, he issued Führer Directive No. 21—an order for the attack on the Soviet Union. It began with this phrase: "The German Wehrmacht must be prepared to crush Soviet Russia in a quick campaign, even before the conclusion of the war against England."

Hitler was going against his own words. In *Mein Kampf* he had warned about the dangers of a two-front war. Now, as master of most of Western Europe, he was prepared to confront the Russian bear before bringing Great Britain to its knees.

Germany had become more dependent on Soviet materials in 1940. While the Soviets were keeping up their part of the bargain, Germany had fallen behind by about 73 million Reichsmarks in its deliveries. A political dispute between the two countries over policies in the Balkans resulted in the Soviet Union briefly suspending deliveries in August.

The suspension showed just how much Germany needed Russia's raw materials. It also showed Hitler just how vulnerable his military might be if a suspension became permanent. Therefore, in his plans for Barbarossa he included the seizure of the mineral- and grain-rich areas in the Ukraine as a prime objective so that he could exploit them. Ironically, Germany had built up enough oil and mineral reserves to consider an attack precisely because of the commercial pact with the Soviet Union.

Another reason for Hitler's decision to invade was the dismal showing of the Red Army during the 1939-1940 Winter War with Finland. Although eventually victorious, the Red Army lost an estimated 150,000-200,000 killed versus about 27,000 Finns. With that in mind, Hitler believed that he could smash the Red Army by the winter of 1941.

"We have only to kick open the door and the whole rotten structure will come crashing down," he said. "Bolshevism will fall like a house of cards."

The opening weeks of Barbarossa proved that he might be right. German forces smashed through Soviet defenses, capturing thousands of prisoners and killing thousands

National Archives



Red Army soldiers lie where they fell in defense of the Motherland against the marauding Germans during the opening days of Operation Barbarossa. During the first weeks of the German invasion of Russia, the Red Army suffered staggering losses. One of these dead soldiers still clutches his standard issue Mosin-Nagant rifle.

more. In the Ukraine and the Baltic States, the Germans were treated like heroes in many places. Initially, Hitler wanted to capture Leningrad and Moscow and the grain-rich areas of the Ukraine. To accomplish these objectives, he divided his forces into three army groups.

Field Marshal Wilhelm Ritter von Leeb's Army Group North was tasked with taking Leningrad, while Field Marshal Fedor von Bock's Army Group Center would drive on Moscow. Covering von Bock's southern flank, Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt's Army Group South would advance through the Ukraine and take Kiev.

The three army groups were making remarkable progress, but they were beginning to encounter heavier Soviet resistance after the initial shock of the invasion wore off. Although Red Army counterattacks were unsuccessful, they showed the Germans that defeating the Soviet Union would not be a walkover.

With its armies retreating deeper inside Russia, the Soviet Defense committee issued a scorched-earth policy meant to deprive the Germans from taking anything useful from their occupied lands. Fields were burned to the ground, and cattle were slaughtered. Behind the lines, factories were ordered to be dismantled. Their machinery would be put on trains and sent far beyond Moscow to be reassembled in new plants. The factory shells would then be demolished.

Throughout the summer, the Soviets lost hundreds of thousands of troops in great battles of encirclement such as Smolensk, Kiev, and Uman, but grinding down the trapped Red Army forces took its toll in time, men, and equipment. Although the battles were great successes for the Germans, they had some dire consequences.

Hitler began to vacillate and started to change the primary objectives of Barbarossa. He split General Heinz Guderian's Panzer Group 2, which was driving toward Moscow, and sent most of it south to the Ukraine to help destroy the encircled Russian forces there. In an order issued on August 21, Hitler said that the primary objective before winter was not Moscow but the capture of the Crimea and the coal

mining area of the Donets basin. After those goals were accomplished, Army Group South was to drive into the Caucasus and take the oilfields at Maikop and Grozny.

The order showed Hitler's lack of understanding concerning logistics and movement. Army Group South was already overextended, and the vast areas it would have to cover to achieve those objectives would mean that supplies would have to travel over hundreds of kilometers of terrain that contained nothing more than a few highways and dirt roads. It was this lack of comprehension that would show itself again and again as the war progressed.

With the destruction of several Soviet armies completed, Hitler once again gave approval for continuation of the attack on Moscow. Although he had destroyed the threat the Russians had posed to Army Group Center's left flank, the time it took to get his divisions back in position for the attack had cost valuable time. The Russian rainy season was setting in, which would hinder the advance of his mechanized forces.

Hitler had overextended his forces in the East, and his forces had suffered substantial casualties that were not fully replaced. He did not have the manpower to accomplish all the goals stated in his Barbarossa directive, and in the crucial early months of the operation the achievement of one goal, mainly the destruction of the Soviet armies in the south, was accomplished only at the expense of another goal, namely the capture of Moscow.

With Army Group Center slogging its way toward the Soviet capital at the beginning of October, temperatures began to plummet. Near Leningrad, heavy snow fell on October 16, a portent of what would be coming at Army Group Center. As the Germans came closer to Moscow they started encountering new divisions that their intelligence had failed to identify. It became clear that the Soviets had more forces than had been anticipated.

By mid-November Hitler had decided to blockade Leningrad instead of taking it outright. In the south von Rundstedt's army group had taken Rostov on the Don,



During a Red Army counteroffensive launched in the winter of 1941-1942, Soviet soldiers dash toward the German lines with bayonets fixed and wearing heavy overcoats to protect them from the bitter cold of the Russian winter. As their campaign lost momentum, the German troops were ill equipped for winter fighting and many of the invaders froze to death still wearing their summer uniforms.

but his supply lines were stretched to the limit, and he could go no farther. With his eyes set on Moscow, Hitler ordered Army Group Center's attack to continue, even though Guderian's Panzer Group 2 was down to 50 operational tanks.

The drive toward Moscow became increasingly difficult. Mud, then snow, slowed the movement of troops and supplies. Soviet defense stiffened, and the German divisions were suffering more casualties, both from wounds and from a new enemy—frostbite.

When winter hit with full force, it caught Hitler's army groups unprepared. Convinced of an early victory, most of the troops found themselves fighting in sub-zero weather with their summer clothing as their only protection. Temperatures plummeted to -25 degrees or less, and the oil in the panzers and armored vehicles froze. Although the Wehrmacht had won great victories during the months since Barbarossa commenced, the Germans were not prepared for the vastness of the Soviet Union or for this terrible winter, one of the worst in a century.

They had also received many surprises along the way. Hitler was fighting in Russia with the same weapons that he had used to conquer the West in 1940. The appearance of Russian tanks such as the T-34 and the heavy KV I and KV II models came as a shock, and they caused panic in many German units. Although poorly managed at this stage of the war, even a few of these monsters could hold up an entire German regiment.

Stalin had another surprise for the Germans. Buoyed by intelligence that Japan would not attack Russia in the East, he was able to transfer several fresh divisions from his Far

Eastern Front to the Moscow area. A counteroffensive under the control of General Georgii K. Zhukov was about to hit the Germans on December 5.

The Soviets had already suffered more than three million unrecoverable losses and about 1.3 million sick and wounded by the time the Soviet winter offensive began. Total German casualties had been about 830,000, of which about 430,000 had been replaced. Both numbers were horrific, but the Russians had the manpower to replace their casualties while the Germans did not.

Because of his racial policies in the East, Hitler had already lost a vast reserve of men that could have been used in his fight against the Soviets. Those conquered areas in western Russia were full of anti-Russian, anti-communist people who had suffered severely under Stalin's reign. However, instead of cultivating their favor, the Germans soon turned many of them into enemies by transporting their grain and cattle to the homeland and with savage reprisals that followed Soviet partisan activities.

The Soviets had already begun counterattacking in southern Russia. A strong force had retaken Rostov, and von Rundstedt was in retreat and was pulling his divisions back to the Mius River. On December 1, 1941, Hitler relieved him, accusing him of defeatism.

Zhukov's offensive stunned the Germans. Except in the Leningrad sector, the Soviets advanced all along the Eastern Front. With the German Army falling back in December, the retreat could have easily turned into a rout. Von Bock was calling for a retreat to prepared positions farther west, but there were none. He was relieved on December 12, the day after Hitler unexpectedly declared war on the United States.

The next to go was von Brauchitsch, whose resignation Hitler accepted on December 17. Instead of Hitler replacing him with another general, the former corporal took over command of the Army himself. With that action he had taken personal responsibility for conducting the war in the East. Along with his position as commander in chief of the armed forces, Hitler now ran operations on all fronts.

"This little affair of operational command is something that anybody can do," he told Chief of the General Staff of the Army Franz Halder. Although he had done it in the past, Hitler would now immerse himself in the day-to-day operations on the Eastern Front.

Both: National Archives



A shell from massed Soviet artillery explodes amid the German lines. As summer gave way to autumn in 1941, German spearheads came within a few miles of Moscow before their Barbarossa offensive stalled. The prolonged campaign resulted in heavy casualties on both sides.

Faced with disaster in the East, Hitler, as historian Alan Bullock wrote, "rose to the occasion." On December 20 he issued an order forbidding further withdrawal. It was a simple order that even the lowliest private could understand. Not an inch of ground was to be given up.

"As for Hitler, it was his finest hour," historian Alan Clark later wrote. "He had done more than save the German Army; he had achieved a complete personal ascendancy over its ruling class."

Still, someone had to be blamed for what had happened. On December 25 Guderian was relieved, followed by von Leeb on January 16. By relieving his three Eastern Front field commanders, Hitler sent the message to others that his orders would from now on be followed to the letter or there would be dire consequences.

From December until March the Russians hit the Germans, forcing their lines back but never quite obtaining the decisive victory they wanted. Hitler's "no retreat" order had worked, and his confidence in his own military expertise rose to new heights.

After the Russian winter offensive wound down in the spring of 1942, Hitler was certain that the Red Army was almost finished. Soviet losses had been horrendous, and he refused to believe that they would be able to replace them. With that in mind, he turned south.

Germany needed oil, much more than what his Romanian and Hungarian allies could produce. He therefore issued Directive 41, calling for an attack that would target the industrial centers in the Don basin, the city of Stalingrad, and the capture of the oil refineries in the Caucasus.

"Our aim is to wipe out the entire defense potential remaining to the Soviets and to cut them off, as far as possible, from their most important centers of war industry," he said. "The enemy has expended during the winter the bulk of reserves intended for later operations."

When Hitler was reading a German intelligence report stating that the Soviets raised another 1-1.25 million men north of Stalingrad and west of the Volga River and

another half million in the Caucasus and that Russian tank production was about 1,200 a month, he flew into a rage and forbade hearing any more “idiotic twaddle.” With that, he resolved to rely on his own intuition and will instead of the hard facts provided by the military.

The southern operation, codenamed Case Blue, was a massive undertaking that would require more troops than Germany could muster. Hitler therefore had to call on his Italian, Romanian, and Hungarian allies to supplement his own forces. Most of those troops were of dubious quality.

Case Blue was opposed by the General Staff, who pointed out that the Army had neither the resources nor the matériel to accomplish the grandiose operation. Hitler would have none of it. The attack would begin on June 28.

At first things went well for the Germans. They reached the city of Voronezh in the north, and the southern thrust was forcing a general Soviet retreat. Thinking that the Soviets were all but defeated, Hitler sent some panzer divisions from his northern force to the south to support a continued advance on Stalingrad and the Caucasus. The move upset further exploitation efforts in the north.

Hitler also split Army Group South in two, with Army Group A to advance into the Caucasus while Army Group B took Stalingrad. Instead of securing one objective before the other, his commanders would now have to dilute their strength to achieve them both, once again showing a lack of overall strategic comprehension from the Führer.

As the Germans continued to drive deeper into southern Russia, the Soviets kept retreating, depriving Army Group South of the encirclement of those forces. By the end of August, ammunition and fuel were running low for the Germans, but they were just a few kilometers from Stalingrad in the north and they were fighting along the Terek River in the Caucasus. In early September, fighting was raging in Stalingrad itself.

Having ordered his troops to take the city, Hitler became obsessed with its cap-

ture. He had committed one of his finest armies, General Friedrich Paulus’s Sixth, to a savage house-to-house battle that would chew up its divisions. The panzer and motorized units in the Sixth Army were all but useless in the close street fighting, and Stalin sent just enough troops to the defenders to keep the city from falling.

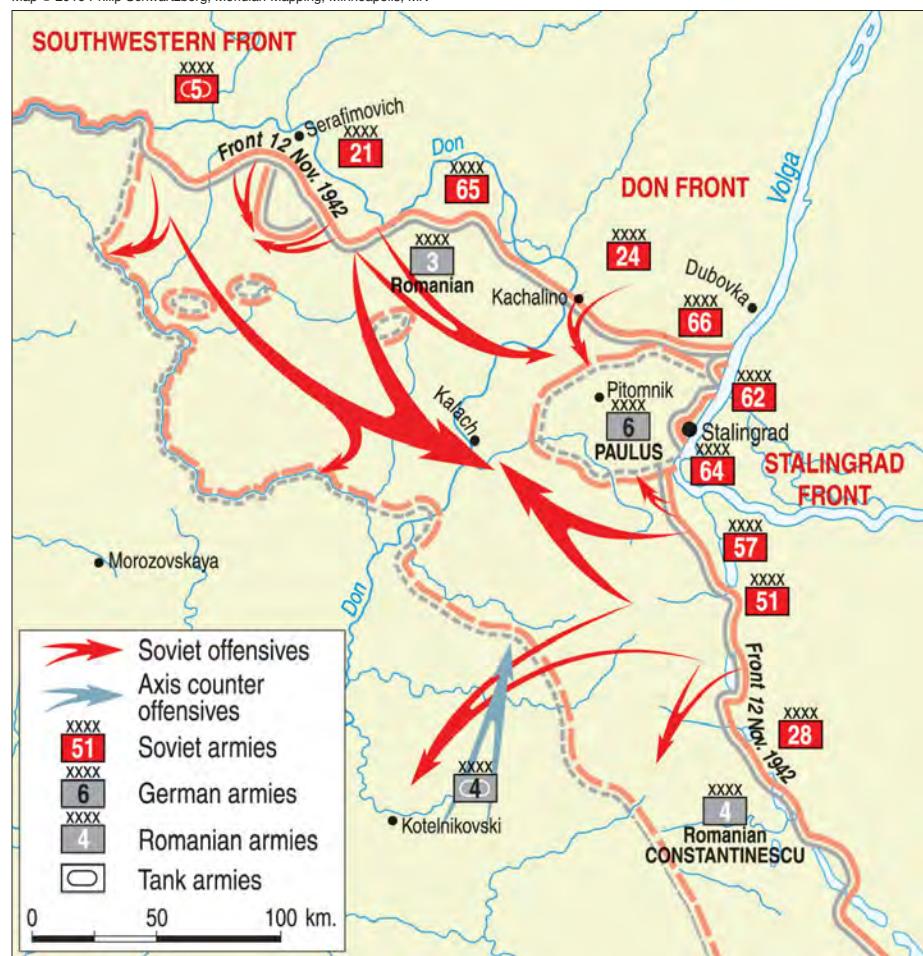
In late fall the troops of both Army Group A and Army Group B found themselves overextended and undersupplied. Their divisions were also understrength—a fact that Hitler failed to take into consideration. From December 1941 to September 1942, the Eastern armies had suffered 1,625,000 casualties but had replaced only 1,165,000 if that number.

As winter approached, the Germans were bogged down in Stalingrad, and the Caucasus operation was at a standstill because of Soviet resistance. Meanwhile, the Russians were preparing their most ambitious operation of the war so far. It was called Operation Uranus.

On November 19, the Russians began a massive assault on the Romanian armies guarding the northern and southern flanks of the Sixth Army. Most of the Romanian divisions simply melted away during the next few days, leaving the few depleted German divisions backing them to fend for themselves. By the 23rd the two Soviet pincers met and the fate of the Sixth Army was sealed.

An inner ring was formed to surround Stalingrad, while other Soviet armies continued

Map © 2016 Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping, Minneapolis, MN



The Soviet counteroffensive at Stalingrad in late 1942 doomed the German Sixth Army, which was subsequently trapped inside the embattled city. In February 1943, the remnants of the once mighty Wehrmacht force, under Field Marshal Friedrich von Paulus, surrendered to the Red Army. The Soviet victory at Stalingrad was a turning point in World War II.



to drive west. The Italian Eighth Army, stationed north of the Romanians, was attacked on December 11, and the Russians enlarged their offensive by attacking the Second Hungarian and Second German armies a month later. With Army Group A in danger of being trapped in the Caucasus, Hitler grudgingly gave approval for those forces to retreat in early January.

At Stalingrad, however, he forbade a withdrawal. With Reichsmarshal Herman Göring's bombastic assurance that his Luftwaffe could supply the Sixth Army, Paulus was left to wither on the vine. The air supply was a failure, and the last German pocket of resistance in the city surrendered on February 1, 1943. An entire army had been lost.

The Soviets continued their offensive into mid-February, when it was halted due to logistics and the sheer exhaustion of the armies involved. In the months since the opening of Uranus, they had driven the German southern armies back from the Don River to the Donets. Both sides had suffered heavily, but the loss of the Sixth Army was something from which Germany could never fully recover.

A series of brilliant moves by Field Marshal Erich von Manstein during the spring helped stabilize the situation in the south. However, Hitler was already looking for another chance for a battle that would forestall any new Soviet offensive after the muddy season. Manstein recommended that the Kursk salient offered such an opportunity. Eliminating the 250-by-160-kilometer salient would not only destroy several Soviet armies but also shorten the line to allow the accumulation of a reserve force that could be used in other areas.

Manstein wanted to start the assault as early as possible, but Hitler postponed the operation until his new Panther, Tiger, and Ferdinand tanks could be produced and sent to the front. The delay allowed the Soviets, who already knew of the impending attack, to strongly fortify the salient.

The battle, which has been the subject of many books and articles, began on July 4. After some initial success, the German assault on the northern sector of the salient bogged down. In the south, Manstein continued to slog his way through the Soviet defenses to participate in the July 12 and 13 tank battle at Prokhorovka before the battle was called off by Hitler due to the Allied invasion of Sicily.

Over the protests of his commanders, Hitler also ordered several mobile units to head west over concerns of more Allied landings. The timing could not have been worse. Within a week after the Germans had pulled back to their pre-Kursk positions, the Sovi-

**Silhouetted against the smoke of battle and the blasted trunks of trees, a German PzKpfw. VI Tiger tank prowls the landscape on July 13, 1943, during the epic Battle of Kursk, one of the largest armored engagements in the history of modern warfare. With its 88mm high-velocity cannon, the Tiger was a formidable opponent on the battlefield, and Soviet tankers chose to close rapidly with it, diminishing the weapon's superiority in effective range.**

ets launched their own assault that overwhelmed them. Although Hitler once again called for his commanders to stand fast, there was little they could do to stem the Soviet tide.

By the end of September, the Soviets had driven westward to beyond Smolensk in the center and had cleared the land from the Donets to the Dnieper. The losses at Kursk deprived the Ostheer (Eastern Army) from having any powerful reserve force to counter the Soviet advances. Kiev was liberated in November, and the 17th Army was cut off in the Crimea. During the four months since the Kursk operation, the Germans had lost more than 900,000 men—a figure that could not be made up.

With Allied air power disrupting war production and an impending invasion in France, Hitler took to meddling more and more in the conduct of the war in the East. There would be no retreats, even against overwhelming odds, unless he personally approved them. His micro-management



extended down to the movement of individual regiments and battalions, putting a heavy weight around the German commanders' necks.

By the end of 1943, the Red Army had become the most powerful fighting force in the world, with 5.57 million troops at the front and more than 400,000 in reserve. By comparison, the Ostheer had about 2.65 million.

During the winter of 1943-1944, the Russians continued to advance in the south. In January they also broke the siege at Leningrad and forced Army Group North to fall back westward toward the Baltic States. The Soviet advances once again took their toll on the German commanders. Angered at the strategic retreats in Army Group South, Hitler relieved two of his best defensive commanders, Field Marshals von Manstein and von Kleist.

The fighting in the Ukraine finally bogged down during the muddy season. During that period, the Soviets used the time to reorganize their forces in the central sector. As Army Groups North and South were pushed back, Army Group Center's position now resembled the Soviet salient at Kursk. It was too tempting a target for the Russians to ignore, and they began massing men and material for a new offen-

sive in the area codenamed Operation Bagration.

While those forces were being marshaled, the advance in the south moved forward once again. On April 8 the Russians began an offensive to clear the Crimea. By May 12 the isthmus had been secured. Although the 17th Army had been able to evacuate some 130,000 men, an estimated 80,000 German troops were lost during the battle.

On June 6 the Allies invaded Normandy. Hitler at once became fixated with the defense of France and pulled valuable air and armored assets from the East to strengthen his Western forces. This gave an extra advantage to the Soviets when Bagration began.

On June 22, exactly three years after the beginning of Barbarossa, the Russians began Bagration. Army Group Center had about 580,000 men, 214,000 of which were combat infantry. The Soviet forces facing it had some 2.5 million soldiers supported by more than 5,000 tanks and 5,000 aircraft, as well as 31,000 artillery pieces.

The opening salvos of artillery devastated many German positions. Soviet infantry and tank forces simply overwhelmed German defenses, surrounding cities like Vitebsk and Bobruisk, leaving them for follow up troops to eliminate. By mid-July the Russians had retaken Minsk and were still advancing westward. By the end of the month, Russian forces had reached the Vistula River in Poland.

Army Group Center's defeat had been complete. Of the 38 German divisions in action, 28 had been smashed. Casualties in killed, wounded or missing were estimated between 350,000 and 400,000. Soviet reports claimed 200,000 Germans killed and 85,000 taken prisoner. Of the 47 German generals involved at corps or divisional level, 10 were killed and 21 were taken prisoner.

The attack on Army Group Center was augmented by attacks both north and south of the main offensive. In August, the reconstituted Sixth Army was destroyed in Romania after more than 150,000 had been killed with another 106,000 captured. The Romanian government soon switched sides, and the vital Ploesti oil fields were lost. Finland also came to terms with the Russians in August. The Bulgarians changed sides the following month.

During the final months of the year, Germany stood alone, except for Hungary, which was coerced into remaining by a considerable German force in the country. Most of Poland had fallen, and portions of East Prussia were occupied.

Hitler now became obsessed with his latest venture, the Ardennes offensive. Ignoring warnings that a new disaster was looming on the Eastern Front, he had committed many



ABOVE: Buildings blaze along a street in the Austrian capital city of Vienna as Red Army troops of the Third Ukrainian Front advance warily. The Red Army carried the war in the East from the doorstep of Moscow to Berlin, capturing the Nazi capital in the spring of 1945. TOP: Soldiers of the resurgent Red Army advance along a dirt road in the Crimea past the hulk of a knocked-out German Sturmgeschutz III self-propelled assault gun. Mounting a 75mm main weapon, the Sturmgeschutz III was a workhorse among German armored units.

of his best panzer divisions to the attack. “The Eastern Front must make do with what it has,” he said.

On January 12, the Red Army unleashed an offensive that brought its forces into Austria in the south and to the Oder in the north. Budapest was lost, as were the industrial centers in Silesia, and Vienna was being threatened. The former Army Group North, which should have been evacuated by sea, was now in an ever shrinking pocket in Courland. Hitler’s refusal to evacuate it deprived the Germans of around 250,000 men.

In March, Hitler ordered an ill-fated offensive in Hungary, which ended after the German force had lost more than 500 irreplaceable panzers. The Soviets counterattacked and were in possession of the Hungarian oil fields at Komarno by the end of the month.

With German armies trapped in Courland and East Prussia, the Russians were able to continue to hammer the enemy forces still defending along the Oder and in Austria. The Germans began evacuating Vienna on April 10. A day earlier, the fortress city of Königsberg, the capital of East Prussia, surrendered.

On April 16 the battle for Berlin began. After three days of bloody fighting the Russians broke through the German defenses guarding the city. By April 22 they were fighting in the suburbs of the German capital, and they had reached the center of the city by April 30. That night Adolf Hitler committed suicide. Berlin surrendered on May 2, and the Soviets accepted the surrender of the German armed forces on May 9, a day after the Germans capitulated to the Western Allies.

Barbarossa had gone full circle. The “house of cards” that Hitler had referred to when planning the invasion was built on a solid foundation—something he failed to consider.

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# THE FINAL SOLUTION

BY BLAINE TAYLOR

## The infamous Wannsee Conference set the “Final Solution” to the Jewish Question in motion.

The quietly held meeting of top Nazi bureaucrats at a secluded villa on Lake Wannsee in the Berlin suburbs on January 20, 1942, institutionalized the event that became known as the Holocaust. In fact, the Wannsee Conference was, in effect, the Holocaust in executive session.

In declaring war on Poland in the German Reichstag (Parliament) on September 1, 1939, Adolf Hitler had asserted once more that the Jews would not live to survive the war’s outcome. The Wannsee Conference was called six weeks after America’s entry into the war to convince Nazi Germany’s bureaucracy that there was no turning back, that for all of them it was either victory or the hangman’s noose. The meeting was officially hosted by the SD (Security Service) of the SS.

Ironically, SS Lt. Col. Adolf Eichmann, the man who ordered the minutes kept, has almost come to overshadow that of his boss and the Holocaust’s chief executive officer, SS General Reinhard Heydrich.

Heydrich was entrusted by Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler with the planning and implementation of what the Nazis euphemistically called the “Final Solution of the Jew-



National Archives

Jewish women and children deemed unfit for work on the way to gas chamber 3 at Birkenau, part of the Auschwitz Concentration Camp.

ish problem.” It was so-termed because the other, prior partial “solutions” had included confiscation of property, forced emigration, imprisonment in concentration camps, mass shootings, gassing in trucks, and being burned alive in buildings.

Now, SS Lt. Col. Adolf Eichmann had discovered a new, more efficient method of disposing of the unwanted 11 million Jews still in Europe: gassing them in fake “showers” using a common insecticide called Zyklon (Cyclone) B delivered through the shower heads in the ceiling. In this way, millions would be killed, and Himmler’s SS men would be spared the mental anguish and ammunition of having to shoot them. The bodies would be cremated in ovens.

Of course, none of this unsavory business would be openly discussed at the Wannsee Conference, but the SS nevertheless achieved its goals under Heydrich’s able chairmanship in the crowded meeting hall. Heydrich had sought a free hand to do what he liked, without interference from the “responsible” agencies of the traditionally conservative government that the radical Nazi Party had taken over but not fully cowed.

However, far more importantly, Heydrich achieved “shared complicity” between his actual killers and the revered official agencies of the Reich according to the excellent book by Mark Roseman, *The Wannsee Conference and the Final Solution: A Reconsideration*. Thus, the number-two man in the SS wanted and got “shared knowledge and responsibility” by the end of the 1½-hour meeting that snowy January 20, 1942.

When Heydrich issued his invitations to the meeting in November 1941, he added the following statement: “On July 31, 1941, the Reich Marshal of the Greater German Reich [Hermann Göring] commissioned me, with the assistance of the other central authorities, to make all necessary organizational and technical preparations for a comprehensive solution of the Jewish question and to present him with a comprehensive proposal at an early opportunity. A photocopy of his instructions is attached to this statement.”

The meeting was held January 20, 1942, at an SD guest house on the lake after Hitler had personally taken over command of the German Army on the Eastern Front and stabilized events there. On December 12, 1941,

Dr. Josef Goebbels had written in his diary, “The world war is now upon us,” and with it the opportunity to eliminate the Jews by killing them all within the “German sphere of influence in Europe.”

By the summer of 1941, the period of mass shootings of Jews by Heydrich’s killing squads in the Baltic states and the Soviet Union was fully under way. The overall mass murder in the east intensified in earnest after September 1941.

As for the disputed role of Reich Chancellor Hitler in all of this, Roseman contends, “He asked for regular reports on *Einsatzgruppen* [Operations Units] activities and a shooting may even have been filmed for him.”

Yet, according to author Roseman, “Overall, the evidence does not support the idea that there was one single clear-cut order to murder all Jews,” but at the center of the effort nonetheless in progress was the Hitler-Göring-Himmler-Heydrich-Eichmann chain of command from top to bottom as well as the bureaucracy assembled at the Wannsee Conference.

Who were these men and what departments did they represent? They were: Dr. Meyer and Dr. Leibbrandt of the Reich Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories (Russia), to be ruled by Alfred Rosenberg; Dr. Stuckart of the Reich Ministry of the Interior, presided over by Dr. Wilhelm Frick (replaced in August 1943 by RFSS Himmler); State Secretary Neumann of the Four-Year Plan, which Göring headed; Dr. Roland Friesler of the Reich Ministry of Justice, who would later preside over the trials of the July 20, 1944, plotters who tried to assassinate the Führer; Dr. Buhler from the Office of Frank’s General-Government; Dr. Hans Luther, representing Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop; SS Senior Col. Klopfer and Ministerial Director Dr. Kritzinger of the Reich Chancellery, headed by Dr. Hans Heinrich Lammers; SS Lt. Gen. Hofmann of the Main Office for Race and Settlement; SS Lt. Gen. Heinrich “Gestapo” Müller and Lt. Col. Eichmann of the Reich Main Security Office (RSHA); SS Senior Col. Dr. Schonfarth, Chief of the Security Police and SD in the General-Government; and SS Major Dr. Lange, commander of the Security Police and the SD for the General District of

Herman Göring Albums/Library of Congress



**ABOVE:** SS General Reinhard Heydrich.  
**BETWEEN:** This estate in the suburbs of Berlin was the location of the Wannsee Conference where Nazi leaders gathered to discuss the Final Solution to the Jewish Question.



Latvia, and deputy chief as well for the Reich Commissariat of Ostland (East Land).

Of the attendees, it is interesting to note that two-thirds had university degrees and over half were lawyers, hardly ignorant SA Stormtrooper street-fighter types.

When put on trial at Nuremberg, the surviving State Secretaries denied that murder had been discussed, but in his own trial at Jerusalem in 1961, Eichmann asserted that it had been. He also added, “According to

the practice until then, all the offices were always trying, for departmental reasons, to delay things and make reservations—in other words, there was always a whole series of individual discussions in the long drawn-out deliberations held until then. Those were dragging on, and there was never a clear-cut solution achieved right away. This was the reason why Heydrich convened this Wannsee Conference, in order, as it were, to press through, on the highest level, his will and the will of the RFSS and Chief of the German Police [Himmler].”

Some had their own hidden agendas. For instance, one of Alfred Rosenberg’s top men concluded as early as January 1942 that Nazi Germany could not win the war and thus wanted the full blame for the killing of the Jews shifted entirely to the bloody hands of the SS as, indeed, happened after the war.

During his trial in Jerusalem, Eichmann noted that this is what occurred, and that Reinhard Heydrich was exceedingly pleased over it. Roseman states, “The Conference of Wannsee was very important, for here Heydrich received his authority as the person in charge of the solution, or the final solution, of the Jewish question. From this point he regarded himself as having the authority in all these matters.”

On April 17, 1942, Himmler ordered the building of the first death camp at Treblinka. On July 14, the RFSS met with Hitler. Himmler launched killings by gas at Auschwitz in Upper Silesia four days later.

Roseman believes “Wannsee was a transition from murderous deportations to a clear program of murder.... Wannsee itself was not the moment of decision. Nobody at Wannsee—not even Heydrich himself—was senior enough to decide on such matters.... Rather it was a signpost indicating that genocide had become official policy.... The State Secretaries had really cleared the way for genocide.”

The war ended on May 8, 1945. In March 1947, during research for the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg, American staffers discovered Copy No. 16 out of the original 30 that had been made of what later became known as the Wannsee Protocol, the minutes of the meeting. Eichmann had given strict orders that they be destroyed, yet Dr. Luther’s copy survived. □



At Boelcke Kaserne, a subcamp of the notorious Nazi concentration camp at Buchenwald, hundreds of corpses lie unburied in various stages of decay. Slave laborers who built V-2 rockets at the nearby Mittelbau-Dora complex were housed at Boelcke Kaserne. OPPOSITE: This drawing from the Nuremberg Chronicle dates to 1493 and depicts Jews being burned alive in Sternberg, Mecklenburg. The actual event took place in 1492 and is evidence of anti-Semitism in Europe that stretched back hundreds of years prior to the ascent of the Nazis.



# HOW THE HOLOCAUST HAPPENED

BY FLINT WHITLOCK



Library of Congress

The Nazi campaign of genocide against Jews and other groups in occupied Europe was an organized, systematic effort that resulted in the murders of millions.

IKE'S jaw was set in a hard line, and his gaze was that of pure, unadulterated anger. He had never seen anything like this before in his life.

It was April 12, 1945. The Supreme Allied Commander was staring incredulously at a cold pile of charred human beings that the Nazis had set on fire before they abandoned the Ohrdruf-Nord labor camp, a sub-camp of Buchenwald, 32 miles to the east at Weimar.

With Eisenhower that day was an entourage of the top American brass: Lt. Gen. Omar N. Bradley, head of 12th Army Group, and Lt. Gen. George S. Patton, Jr., commander of Third U.S. Army. Also at

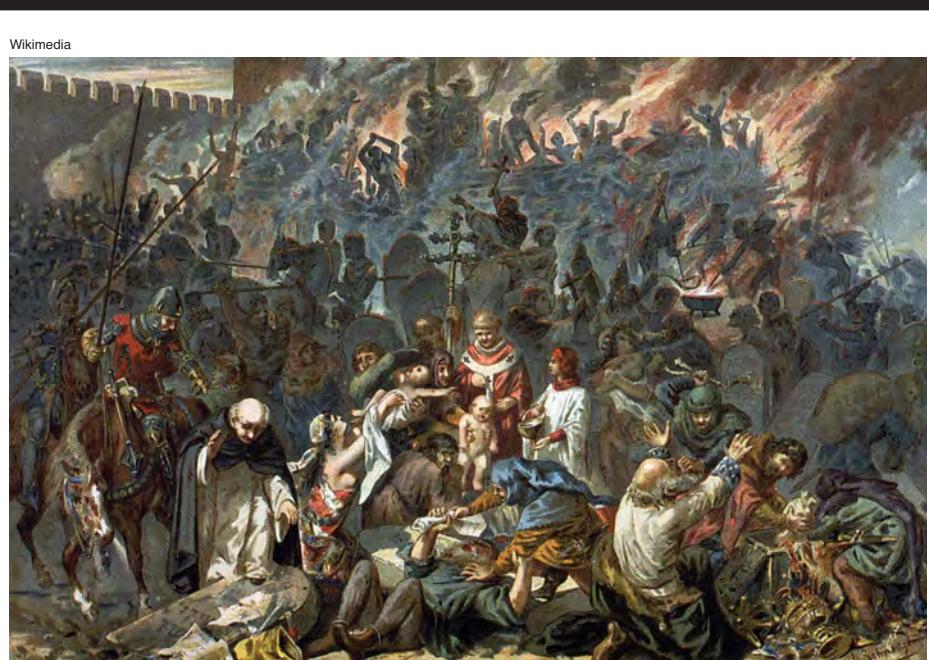


**ABOVE:** Protestant theologian Martin Luther wrote extensively on the topic of the Jews of Europe, scorning the race. **RIGHT:** On February 14, 1349, the Strasbourg Massacre, in which hundreds of Jews were burned to death in public executions, took place. Many other Jews were expelled from the city during the violence, which was precipitated through the perceived association of the Jews with the horror of the Black Death that swept across Europe during the period.

Ike's side were a number of other high-ranking officers and a group of military policemen, photographers, and reporters.

Everyone was silent as they moved from one horrendous exhibit to another. Here in one foul-smelling barracks was a pile of decomposing corpses sprinkled with lime. Scattered across the ground were dead bodies in grotesque poses wearing what looked like striped pajamas. Over there was a wooden table; an interpreter explained to the group how prisoners who had broken the rules were stretched over the table and beaten unmercifully with a whip. In another corner was a shallow grave that held the bodies or ashes of more than 3,000 inmates. Everyone remarked about the horrible stench that pervaded the spring air.

It was almost too much to comprehend—or bear. Bradley just stared blankly from behind his black-rimmed glasses. Patton—“Old Blood and Guts” who once exhorted his troops to grease the axles of their tanks with German intestines—went



behind a building and threw up.

The German civilians’ insistence that they had known nothing about what had been going on behind the walls and electrified barbed wire of the camps rang hollow. To make sure that the citizens of the small town of Ohrdruf, famous as the place where a young Johann Sebastian Bach had his earliest musical training and where the Kewpie Doll was born, Colonel Hayden Sears of the 4th Armored Division arranged for these citizens to take an escorted tour of the camp and see what their countrymen had been doing for years. (Patton would do the same thing at Buchenwald when he reached Weimar three days later.)

After visiting a camp, war correspondent Meyer Levin wrote, “We had known. The world had vaguely heard. But until now no one of us had looked on this.... It was as though we had penetrated at last to the center of the black heart, to the very crawling inside of the vicious heart.”

He was reacting to the fact that, although stories of Nazi concentration camps and the persecution of the Jews had been appearing in U.S. and British newspapers since 1933, very few people gave the stories much credence. So there were no instructions to advancing troops about what to do if a camp full of sick and starving prisoners was encountered. Military maps did not even have camps marked on them.

Since the end of the war, several questions have been asked. How did what has become known as the Holocaust happen? How could Germany, one of the most cultured nations on Earth, turn into a nation of murderous sadists? Why were the Jews the primary targets for Adolf Hitler and his Nazi henchmen within the Third Reich?

It would be easy (not to mention wrong) to assume that anti-Semitism was the exclusive purview of Hitler and the Nazi Party. Hitler was merely the culmination of a long history of mankind’s mistrust, hatred, and violence against persons of the Jewish faith.

To understand how this mistrust and hatred exploded into a paroxysm of mass murder, one must go back thousands of years, beginning with ancient Egypt, when, according to biblical texts, the Jews lived as slaves until Moses led them out of Egypt in search of “the promised land,” where they could live in freedom and worship a singular deity—not the multiple gods of Egypt.

Settling in Judea and Samaria (today Israel), the Jews built their capital of Jerusalem at least 4,400 years ago. “The Jews were a people apart,” German historian Klaus Fischer noted, “not only by virtue of the fact that they maintained separate religious beliefs but because of distinct cultural practices as well.... The Jews practiced a reverence for learn-

ing and philosophical thinking centuries before the existence of the early Greek city-states or the Roman republic."

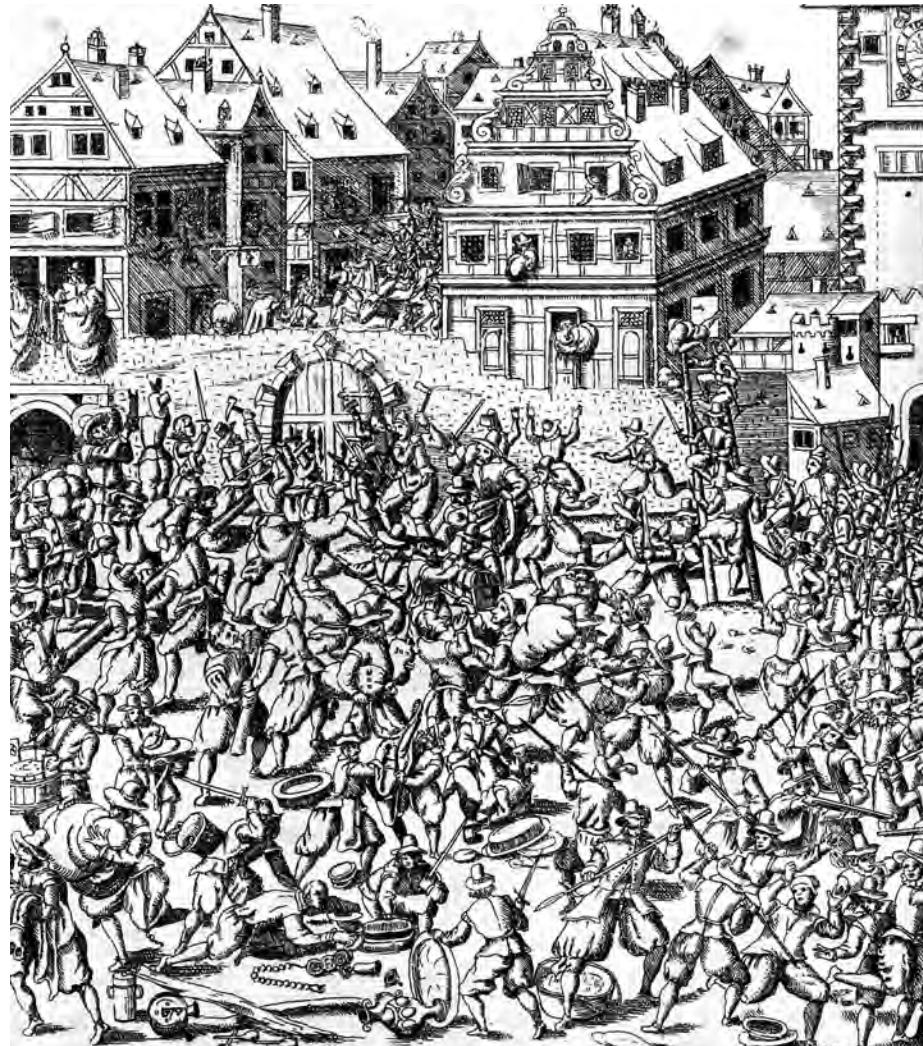
When the Romans conquered much of the Middle East, they found that the Jews refused to submit to Roman rule, and in their anger Caesar's legions destroyed the "second temple" (i.e., Herod's Temple, built in 516 BC, destroyed in AD 70).

The Middle Ages in Europe were a time of a great awakening of Christian fervor and a desire to expunge any non-Christian thought. As one historical scholar has noted, "When Jews entered into Europe in large numbers during the Middle Ages, they found themselves living among primitive Western people who were repelled by their superior intelligence and their clever business acumen. There was mutual contempt and hate ... the two peoples were living geographically alongside each other, but they were immersed in different cultural stages."

An outburst of anti-Jewish violence took place in Spain in 1391 (although anti-Semitic laws in the Iberian Peninsula date back a thousand years earlier). To avoid persecution, many Spanish Jews converted to Christianity (becoming known as Conversos or "crypto-Jews"), but this conversion was seen by the Roman Catholic Church as cynical and not a true rejection of Judaism and an embrace of Christianity.

In 1492, following the Spanish Christians' reconquest of Spain from the Muslims (under

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On August 22, 1614, an orgy of violence against the Jews erupted in the German city of Frankfurt. This drawing depicts the chaos of the plundering of the Judengasse, or Jewry, in the city and its environs.

whom the Jews had enjoyed preferential status), Spanish king Ferdinand II and the clergy requested that Pope Sixtus IV issue a "Papal bull" that allowed the Spanish to seek out and punish "crypto-Jews." Tribunals, known as inquisition councils, were established to identify and punish heretics; perhaps 40,000-50,000 were killed; others were expelled or fled Spain.

In the ensuing years, as anti-Jewish fervor grew, the Jews were also murdered or expelled from England, France, Portugal, and Bohemia. In Russia, Jews were restricted to living in one certain region, while in Italy Jews were confined to urban areas known as "ghettos."

During the Renaissance, the so-called Age of Enlightenment, anti-Semitism continued to be promulgated by a number of religious leaders, the most prominent being the German theologian Martin Luther. After he broke away from the Catholic Church, Luther expected that the Jews, who had shown resistance to the Church, would convert to his remodeled form of Christianity; when they did not, he turned violently against them.

In his 1543 text, *The Jews and Their Lies*, Luther wrote, "I had made up my mind to write no more either about the Jews or against them, but since I learned that these miserable and accursed people do not cease to lure to themselves even us, that is, the Christians, I have published this little book, so that I might be found among those who opposed such poisonous activities of the Jews who warned the Christians to be on their guard against them...."

Luther goes on to urge Christians to drive the Jews out of their towns "like mad dogs," destroy their homes, businesses, and synagogues, take their gold, silver, and cash, and commit other acts of mayhem against them. Since more than half of Germany was Protestant (Lutheran), many Germans grew up listening to sermons by Martin Luther and by pastors who were influenced by him. It is perhaps no wonder that so many generations of Germans held a deep-seated antipathy toward the Jews in their midst.

Wilhelm Marr, a German writer, was

probably the first person to use the term “anti-Semitism” in his pamphlet *The Victory of Judaism Over Germandom*. Marr postulated that acculturated Jews (i.e., those who adopted European dress, styles, and manners) would eventually subvert traditional German culture; they would corrupt “all [German] standards ... dominate commerce, push themselves ever more into state services.”

With economic difficulties afflicting Europe in the mid-1870s, thousands of poor and middle-class Germans who feared for their futures had their anti-Jewish attitudes reinforced by Marr’s pamphlet.

It is unknown exactly how Adolf Hitler developed his antipathy toward Jews. Was it a specific incident, or simply the influence of the general pervasive anti-Semitic attitudes so prevalent throughout Europe at that time? It is unlikely that he heard any sermons based on Luther’s vitriol since he grew up in a Catholic family in Austria.

Hitler started out wanting to become an artist, not necessarily someone whose goal was to exterminate the Jews and conquer the world. In early 1908, after his mother’s death, the 17-year-old Hitler moved from Linz to Vienna in hopes of being admitted to the prestigious Vienna Academy of Fine Arts.

But he was rejected, perhaps by Jewish members of the admissions committee, and he found himself virtually alone in Vienna, living in a homeless shelter, eating at charitable soup kitchens, and barely scraping by as a painter of postcards and posters for Jewish merchants’ shop windows.

Hitler’s boyhood friend, August Kubizek, joined him in Vienna and recalled Hitler’s growing obsession with Jews during that pre-World War I period. One day Kubizek and Hitler walked past a synagogue while a Jewish wedding was taking place; Hitler insisted that they go in and watch the ceremony. Kubizek said, “I concluded from our strange visit that Adolf really wanted to study thoroughly the Jewish problem and thereby convince himself that the religious practices of the Jews still survived. This, I hoped, might soften his

biased view but I was mistaken, for one day Adolf came home and announced decidedly, ‘Today I joined the Anti-Semitic Union....’”

Hitler wrote at length about his antipathy in his political manifesto *Mein Kampf*. He said that one day in Vienna he saw an Orthodox Jew in black caftan, sidelocks, and broad-brimmed hat, and wrote, “Is this a Jew? But the longer I stared at this foreign face ... my question formed a new form: Is this a German? Gradually I began to hate them [the Jews]. For me this was the time of the greatest spiritual upheaval I have ever gone through. I had ceased to be a weak-kneed cosmopolitan and became an anti-Semite.”

He added, “I owe it to that period that I grew hard and am still capable of being hard.”

But Hitler’s greatest dislike for Jews was formulated not from their manner of dress or their customs but from the idea of race and blood. In Europe, the notion of white racial superiority emerged in the 1850s and remained prevalent in Europe and the United States for a century.

As he got older, Hitler began voraciously reading and absorbing the works of some of the most prominent anti-Semitic philosophers and racial theorists of the day, men such as Arthur de Gobineau, Heinrich Treitschke, the composer Richard Wagner, and Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Wagner’s English son-in-law.

From these authors and others came the idea that the so-called “Aryan race,” made up of Nordic and Scandinavian types, was the epitome of human development and that all other races (especially the Jews) were inferior.

Hitler came to fervently believe that the German “Aryans” were “the highest species of humanity on earth and will remain so ... with care for the purity of their own blood.” This meant that the Untermensch (“sub-humans”—i.e., the Jews, Arabs, Slavs, Gypsies, Asians, and Negroes etc.) would need to be eliminated so that they would not contaminate German blood.

From these men and others Hitler formed his philosophy about race and anti-Semitism. He also became increasingly obsessed with politics. In May 1913, he left Vienna for Munich, still looking for a direction in life; he remained homeless and penniless.

The following summer a Serbian nationalist shot and killed Archduke Franz Ferdinand of the Austro-Hungarian Empire; to avenge the death, Germany belligerently came to the defense of Austria, various other countries declared war on Germany, and what was

**In 21 cities across Germany in May 1933, the German Student Union burned thousands of books with content that was deemed ‘Un-German.’ The Propaganda Ministry of Josef Goebbels encouraged such public displays of support for the Nazi movement. Brownshirts of the SA are visible at left.**



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**ABOVE:** Standing in front of a Jewish-owned shop on the Friedrichstrasse in Berlin, Brownshirts of the SA guard a placard that denounces the Jews and firmly discourages buying goods from them. This photo was taken on April 1, 1933, and through the remainder of the 1930s the Nazi persecution of the Jews gained intensity. **RIGHT:** A high-ranking member of the Nazi Party and confidante of Hitler, Alfred Rosenberg was responsible for expounding the Nazi philosophy of anti-Semitism.

called the Great War began.

Adolf Hitler enlisted in a Bavarian regiment and went off to fight in France. Gassed on the battlefield during the last battle of Ypres, Corporal Hitler was recuperating in hospital in November 1918 when he learned that Germany had capitulated. The news infuriated him.

The rumor going around was that the German Army, undefeated on the battlefield, was “stabbed in the back” by politicians back home—especially Communist and Jewish ones. The news devastated Hitler and filled him with a resolve to seek revenge against the Jews, the Communists, the Allies, and the “November criminals,” as those who surrendered in 1918 were called. Once he had recovered his health and was mustered out of the service, Hitler, as footloose and undecided about his future as ever, joined a tiny, anti-Communist political party in Munich that had been formed by one Anton Drexler. It was called the German Workers Party.

In 1920 Hitler took over as party leader, changed the name to the National Socialist German Workers Party, and began speaking to ever-growing crowds and molding the group to reflect his personal philosophies. Above all, he wanted to gain a position of power so that he could overthrow the old regime and implement his ideas to save Germany and prevent the “mongrelization” of the Aryan race.

Even at that early date, Hitler and his Nazi Party, as the group’s name was abbreviated, were declaring that Jews should not be permitted to hold public office and saying that any Jews who arrived in Germany after August 2, 1914 (the date that Russia began assaulting German territory), should be deported. Over time the declarations would grow ever more radical and extreme.

In November 1923, Hitler attempted to overthrow the Bavarian government, but the Putsch was put down and Hitler and followers were arrested. While in prison, Hitler wrote



*Mein Kampf*, which blamed the Jews for many of Germany’s problems.

As Hitler’s Nazi Party began to gain traction, he surrounded himself with persons who shared his beliefs. Hans F.K. Günther, a professor of anthropology, became one of the premier racial theorists of Hitler’s Germany. A fervent disciple of Gobineau and Chamberlain, Günther believed that the “Nordic Aryan” was the “ideal type” of person necessary for furthering the progress of civilization.

Günther blamed the Gypsies (or Roma) for “introducing foreign blood” into Europe, but he also regarded Jews as inferiors, and his writings contributed to the growing anti-Semitic climate in Germany.

Alfred Rosenberg also became one of Hitler’s favorite racial theorists. Like Hitler and Günther, he was very familiar with the works of Gobineau, Chamberlain, and many others. In the coming war with the Soviet Union, while serving as Reich Minister of the Occupied Eastern Territories, that is, land seized from the Soviet Union, Rosenberg would help plan and carry out the murder of millions of Jews in Eastern Europe.

Learning a lesson from his failed 1923 Putsch, Hitler realized that ballots, not bul-

lets, were the path to power, and he decided to attain that power legally by running for office in 1932. Aiding Hitler in his quest was Josef Goebbels, a masterful propagandist who had been a close associate of his since the 1920s.

It was Goebbels who skillfully used the new medium of radio to broadcast Hitler's speeches to an adoring public and encouraged Hitler to fly between German cities so that he could make several personal appearances in a single day. Hitler's constant campaign theme: Jews are to blame for Germany's problems, and he—Adolf Hitler—was the only one who could restore Germany to greatness.

Meanwhile, chaos in Germany was increasing, and it was feared that the Communists were about to overthrow the government and seize power. In the 1932 elections, President Paul von Hindenburg, now 84, reluctantly agreed to run for another

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seven-year term; Hitler was his main opponent.

After a series of complex intrigues, Hindenburg named Hitler chancellor and when Hindenburg died in August 1934, Hitler declared himself the sole leader of Germany—der Führer.

Hitler knew that he must move cautiously at first, taking small, incremental steps toward the goal he sought to attain: the elimination of his political enemies; moving too quickly might alienate the German populace and undo his carefully crafted plans. Once the German people accepted the logic behind Hitler's moves, he believed that he would be able to set his sights on more drastic measures.

He relied on Goebbels, now the Third Reich's minister of propaganda, to gain the people's acceptance of Hitler's moves. By shaping public opinion through absolute control of the print, film, broadcast media, and the arts,

Goebbels was able to burnish Hitler's image as the "savior of Germany," the man whose indomitable will would enable Germany to regain her former position as the greatest nation in Europe—a nation to be admired and feared.

Goebbels' propaganda machine became vital in convincing the German people to accept the "necessity" of Hitler's draconian measures.



ABOVE: In this infamous photo, a German officer is purported to be selecting new arrivals at the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration complex for either work or extermination. The train that has recently transported new inmates to the camp is at right, while the iconic gate is visible in the distance. TOP: Still burning the morning after it was set afire during the Night of Broken Glass, a synagogue blazes on November 10, 1938. Some German citizens have gathered to watch the conflagration, while others scurry past as if to avoid the terrible scene.



LEFT: On the night of November 9, 1938, a wave of Nazi-inspired violence against the Jewish race swept across Germany. Synagogues and Jewish businesses were burned. So many windows were broken that the event came to be known as Kristallnacht, or the Night of Broken Glass. In this photo, German citizens go about their business on the morning after the horrific event. BELOW: Julius Streicher's virulently anti-Semitic newspaper *Der Stürmer* was widely distributed in Germany and fanned the flames of hatred of the Jews during the Nazi era. Streicher was taken prisoner after World War II and hanged as a war criminal at Nuremberg.



Portrayed as both the benevolent “Uncle Adolf” who loved children and dogs and ceremoniously opened new Autobahns and put Germans back to work, and the raspy voiced, fanatical dictator who railed against the Jews and other enemies of his self-proclaimed Third Reich, millions of Germans became convinced that he would restore the glory of Germany.

Feeding on the Germans’ already existing, deep-seated animosity toward the Jews, Goebbels rolled out a heavy propaganda blitz. Julius Streicher’s virulent anti-Semitic newspaper *Der Stürmer*, which began publishing in 1923, played a large role, as did Goebbels’ newsreels and feature films such as *Jud Süss* and *The Eternal Jew*. Every effort was made to paint the Jews as dangerous threats to the existence of the German people and nation and to erode any residual sympathy that Germans might have held toward them.

The schools, too, were important centers of indoctrination. With the Nazis controlling the teachers, textbooks, and lesson plans, children received an early and heavy dose of anti-Jewish propaganda. And organizations such as the Hitler Youth and the League of German Girls, while seemingly innocuous, activity-oriented youth clubs, were in reality designed to make their members willing and enthusiastic supporters of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party.

Another key figure in the overall scheme to get the nation behind Hitler and accept his programs was architect and later Minister of Armaments and War Production Albert Speer, the creative force behind the spectacle of the Nuremberg rallies, who generated excitement and increased popular support that gave Hitler and the Nazis a presence that was larger than life.

To reward those who had been faithful to him, Hitler handed out favors and perquisites. To Hermann Göring he gave the leadership of a secret police force—the Gestapo, an acronym for Geheimstaatspolizei. Göring would also become president of the Reichstag, Germany’s parliament. To crack down on his opponents, Hitler directed the faithful Heinrich Himmler, chief of his private bodyguard, the SS (Schutzstaffel), and Himmler’s ruthless deputy, Reinhard Heydrich, to establish a series of concentration camps for political opponents.

Dissent in New Germany was forbidden; everyone was required to toe the Party line. Those who didn’t did not last long. Thought control was at the forefront of nearly every-

thing, and the Gestapo was constantly listening to conversations and reading what was being said about the Hitler regime. In the spring of 1933, Nazi college students burned books—especially those by Jewish authors. The effort to expunge Jews from German society was gaining speed.

On March 3, 1933, the first concentration camp appeared: a few barracks at a small military airfield at Nohra, southwest of Weimar. A couple of weeks later came a larger political prison—at Dachau, a Munich suburb.

Dachau’s first commandant was a hard-nosed SS colonel and ex-policeman named Theodor Eicke. It was he who would set the rules and standards for SS men detailed as guards (known as the Totenkopfverband, or Death’s-Head Unit) throughout the concentration camp system. Eicke once told his recruits, “There is no place in the ranks of the SS for men with soft hearts, and any such would do

well to retire to a monastery."

The camp guards and administrators were thoroughly indoctrinated to see themselves as the guardians of the nation; their role was to protect Germany from its internal enemies. As a consequence, the guards (women as well as men) became infamous for their cruel, pitiless treatment of prisoners.

Most of the early inmates were Communists, dissidents, and anti-Nazis, and the camps were strictly "re-education centers" that attempted to show the incarcerated the errors of their ways. Once prisoners were deemed to be reformed, thanks to hard labor and not a little torture, most were paroled.

Lest anyone think that the concentration camp system was a minor operation, it was anything but. Eventually there were about 1,000 sizable camps such as Dachau, Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen, Mauthausen, Ravensbrück, Stutthof, Gross-Rosen, Natzweiler, Flossenbürg, and many others, plus some 20,000 smaller ones.

Most of these were slave-labor camps where inmates were forced to work on various projects for the Third Reich, such as construction and arms manufacturing for private corporations including Krupp, I.G. Farben, Bosch, Blaupunkt, Daimler-Benz, Junkers, Siemens, Volkswagen, etc. The SS would grow wealthy on "renting" these slave laborers to civilian contractors whose male employees had been conscripted into the armed forces.

The logistics, manpower, and infrastructure effort needed to sustain such a massive operation, especially in the midst of a war, was stupendous.

Upon the death of Paul von Hindenburg on August 2, 1934, Hitler, with the support of his cronies in the Reichstag, seized dictatorial powers. And the Reichstag, under Göring's presidency, promulgated a number of laws designed to make life so difficult for Jews that they would leave Germany.

Broadly speaking, the so-called "Nuremberg Laws" (because they were enacted by the Reichstag during the Nazi Party's annual meeting in Nuremberg in September 1935), established criteria that deter-

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**Major German corporations, some of which still exist today, took advantage of the slave labor available from the concentration camps. Some of the camps were located close to manufacturing facilities to ease the movement of laborers to and from their grinding work locations. The IG Farben plant at Auschwitz-Monowitz was one of these.**

mined who would be considered an Aryan and who would be a full or partial Jew (Mischling). A Jew was defined as anyone who was born to one or more Jewish parents or who had three or four Jewish grandparents.

These laws deprived German Jews—even those who had fought for the kaiser in the Great War—of their German citizenship and made them "subjects" of the Reich. Other provisions prohibited marriage or sexual relations between Jews and non-Jewish Germans; ordered that names of Jewish soldiers who died during the Great War be removed from war memorials; ordered that sports clubs and orchestras dismiss Jewish members; banned the performance of music by Jewish composers; restricted Jews from using certain public facilities; prohibited Jews from owning weapons and ammunition; removed Jews from various professions that gave them contact with Aryans, such as teaching, medicine, law, civil service; and much more.

All this came at an embarrassing moment: Germany was about to host the 1936 Olympic Games and the International Olympic Committee, along with several nations, was calling for the games to be taken away from Germany. In a cynical move to preserve the games, the Nazis temporarily suspended the persecutions and harassment of Jews for the duration in order to present a false, benevolent face to the world. But once the games ended, persecution and harassment returned with a vengeance.

Knowing that everything from dogs to cattle are bred to weed out weak genetic characteristics of the breed and develop stronger, healthier individuals, a group of social scientists felt the same thing could—and should—be done with people.

Thus was born the social philosophy of eugenics as it was applied to human beings. This movement, which began in Britain in the early 20th century and had a strong following in Europe and the United States, sought to increase the birth rates of those with "positive" traits while imposing restrictions on those determined to have "negative" traits.

In keeping with his beliefs that Aryans represented the pinnacle of human evolution, Hitler decided to use this "science" to rid Germany of those who would pollute and weaken

the gene pool. Thus, to keep Aryan blood untainted and the pure Germanic stock strong, in October 1939 the Nazis established a secret program of involuntary euthanasia called "Aktion T-4," after the address of the agency in Berlin (Tiergartenstrasse 4) that ran it.

The German people, through a well-orchestrated propaganda campaign, were told that it was in their and their nation's best interests to prevent certain groups—such as the mentally and physically disabled, the chronically ill, children with birth defects, persons of low intelligence, criminals, deviants, the poor and uneducated, promiscuous women, homosexuals, and members of disfavored minority groups—from reproducing, either among themselves or with "healthy" Germans.

To further this end, compulsory abortions and sterilization of populations deemed unfit to exist were instituted. By eliminating the possibility for society's "damaged" members to reproduce, the human race could be genetically cleansed, leaving only the fittest alive.

The German government told parents of retarded children to place them in government centers disguised as orphanages and the taxpayer would pay for their care. Thousands of parents went along with this; months later they received letters stating that their children had died from some disease (but were actually murdered) and had been cremated "for health purposes."

Additionally, secret murders of "patients" took place at six euthanasia facilities, the most notorious of which was the Hadamar psychiatric hospital, where more than 15,000 patients were killed from 1939-1945.

Such early successes in eliminating certain groups without much, if any, opposition from the general populace soon gave the Nazis confidence that they could proceed to the next step—the mass extermination of the Jews and other "undesirables."

The first large-scale, blatant pogrom against the Jews took place on November 9-10, 1938. A German Jew named Herschel Grynszpan had just shot and killed German diplomat Ernst vom Rath in Paris. As a result, Goebbels encouraged the Germans to go on a rampage, smashing Jewish-owned businesses, attacking Jews in the streets, and torching

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The inhuman treatment of the concentration camp inmates at Buchenwald and other camps shocked the American soldiers who liberated the survivors. This Hungarian Jew has been starved to the extent that his backbone is visible from the front of his body.

synagogues.

Because of all the glittering broken window glass in the streets—the word Kristallnacht, or "the night of broken glass"—was given to the incident. Some 30,000 Jewish males were also rounded up and sent to concentration camps.

In a January 30, 1939, speech to the Reichstag, Hitler clearly stated his goals as they pertained to the Jews of Europe: "If the international Jewish financiers in and outside Europe should succeed in plunging the nations once more into a world war, then the result will not be the Bolshevizing of the earth, and thus the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe."

A world war soon followed, but it was not started by "international Jewish financiers."

After Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, squads of Einsatzgruppen, or special mobile killing units, followed the combat forces into the cities, towns, and villages to round up Jews (approximately two million lived in Poland at the time) and slaughtered them. As one historian pointed out, "From the very outset this was an ideological war. The aim was to subjugate the Polish people, to ghettoize the Jews, to eradicate Polish national identity and to destroy Polish culture."

Another author, Donald McHale, has even postulated that the entire war was simply a cover for the Nazis' program of extermination of the Jews, much in the way that a burglar might burn down a home to mask his burglary.

As more and more of Europe was taken over by Germany and after Hitler invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941, millions of Jews fell into the clutches of the Nazis. Since the executions by the Einsatzgruppen were terribly slow and inefficient, Hitler and his cronies were confronted with the problem of how to eliminate millions of Jews on an unprecedented scale.

One idea, the forced deportation of Jews to the island of Madagascar, then a French colony, was proposed in 1940 but discarded as impractical. Another way needed to be found.

Because Hitler recognized that there was

very little internal opposition to the nationwide persecution of the Jews (mostly likely due to the fact that anyone who spoke out against the persecution quickly disappeared into concentration camps themselves), this acquiescence emboldened the Nazis to take the next step—the “final solution of the Jewish question.”

And what exactly was “the Jewish Question”? Since Hitler and the Nazis decided that Aryans and Jews were incompatible and could not live together, something had to be done to eliminate the Jews from Germany. But how should this be accomplished? Four possible solutions were considered: isolate the Jews from Aryan German society; persecute them so they will leave; deport them; or exterminate them.

The first two solutions had already been tried, but with mixed results, and the plan to deport Jews to Madagascar was determined not to be practical. The only solution left was the most drastic.

A month after the invasion of the Soviet Union, Hitler directed Hermann Göring to instruct Reinhard Heydrich to carry out the fourth and “final” solution. At a January 20, 1942, meeting in a villa in the Berlin district of Wannsee, Heydrich, Adolf Eichmann, and a group of lawyers, industrialists, cabinet ministers, and logistics specialists dispassionately discussed the various ways that huge numbers of people could be systematically murdered.

Various methods had already been experimented with; the use of gas vans, in which carbon monoxide was pumped from a truck’s tailpipe into a sealed box van full of people, was deemed too slow and inefficient, and shooting large groups was found to be too emotionally stressful for the gunmen.

It was decided that large numbers of people could be crammed into sealed rooms and poison gas pumped in, resulting in death in just a few minutes. Zyklon-B, a commercial pesticide, was considered the most efficient poison.

Six large extermination centers, all of which were located in Poland, were purpose-built to do the job. These were Auschwitz-Birekna, Belzec, Chelmno,

Majdanek, Sobibor, and Treblinka. Jews and other undesirables were rounded up in their hometowns, crammed into rail cars, and shipped to the killing centers. To prevent panic and revolt, the deportees were told that they were being “resettled.”

During the offloading process, Nazi personnel such as Dr. Josef Mengele at Auschwitz-Birkenau made a quick assessment as to which ones looked healthy enough to be useful

Both: National Archives



ABOVE: Generals Dwight D. Eisenhower, Omar Bradley, and George S. Patton, Jr., stand with staff officers and survey the harvest of death at the Ohrdruf camp at Buchenwald. BELOW: Eisenhower decreed that the German civilians who occupied nearby towns should be brought to Buchenwald to see the extent of the atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis. Although some German civilians denied that they had any knowledge of what was happening at Buchenwald, it would have been difficult not to suspect that horrible crimes were being committed there.





as slave laborers for the state and which ones were too young, too weak, or too old to be of any value. Those determined to be useless were immediately dispatched to the gas chambers and, subsequently, to cremation ovens or burning pits.

Such a massive execution program had to be carried out in strictest secrecy, but it was an open secret. There was no way of keeping the general populace from noticing the hundreds of trains running day and night across Germany with their pitiful human cargo on the way to the camps. And the civilians working at the camps undoubtedly knew what was going on, although probably not the details. Then, too, there was the smoke drifting from the crematorium chimneys that smelled of burning flesh.

It should also be noted that, even if an ordinary German citizen wanted to report the atrocities taking place, to whom could he or she report them? They could not go to the police or the newspapers because the police and newspapers were controlled by the government. It was best, therefore, just to keep silent if one did not want to join those in striped uniforms behind the walls and electrified barbed wire.

In a speech to SS generals in Posen on October 4, 1943, Heinrich Himmler said, "Among ourselves it should be mentioned quite frankly—but we will never speak of it publicly.... The Jewish race is to be exterminated.... It is our program and we're doing it." In a later speech he said, "We have only one task—to stand firm and carry on the racial struggle without mercy."

And so the Nazis' ghastly killing apparatus continued rolling inexorably forward. It was not until January 1945, when the Russians uncovered Auschwitz, where approximately a million Jews died, that the world finally began to learn the awful truth.

As the war gradually swung in the Allies' favor and defeat for Germany became certain, attempts were made by the Nazis to conceal the magnitude of the crime. In March 1945, Himmler ordered that evidence of mass murder be destroyed and the camps in the paths of the advancing Allied armies be emptied and the prisoners sent on death marches; the sick and starving prisoners were marched—in some cases for weeks—until they died along country roads or were shot by their guards when they could not keep up.

No one knows exactly how many people died under the 12 years of the Nazi regime. According to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, six million Jews from Germany and all the occupied territories perished, along with seven million Soviet civilians (including 1.3 million Soviet Jews who are included in the six million figure); three million Soviet prisoners of war; 1.8 million non-Jewish Polish civilians; around 200,000

**A model of ghastly efficiency that was strained to keep up with the numbers of dead inmates at Auschwitz-Birkenau, 52 crematorium ovens, such as these, were capable of burning 6,000 bodies every 24 hours.**

Gypsies (Roma); more than 300,000 Serbian civilians; up to 250,000 persons with disabilities (the Aktion T-4 program); 1,900 Jehovah's Witnesses; and a large but unknown number of criminals, asocials, homosexuals, political opponents, and resistance activists.

These staggering figures do not include combat deaths caused by Hitler's troops.

Shaken by what he had seen at Ohrdruf, General Eisenhower made a point, even before the war in Europe was over, of directing commanders to send their units, when operational requirements permitted, to visit Buchenwald, where ex-prisoners acted as tour guides to show the GIs the horrors that had been committed there by the Third Reich.

"It's been said that our soldiers don't know what they're fighting for," Ike commented, "but at least now they'll know what they're fighting against."

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**T**he chief shuffled to his seat in the underground conference room. He sat down heavily, eyes unfocused and dreamy, while a litany of woes was read to him. His military had sustained well over one million casualties in the past three months. Strong enemy forces were pushing against his country's



ABOVE: Adolf Hitler, OKW commander Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel (right), and OKW Chief of Operations Colonel General Alfred Jodl pore over a map in their headquarters. Hitler conceived the bold offensive in the West during the winter of 1944-1945.

RIGHT: German infantrymen wearing the camouflage smocks of the SS dash across a road littered with wrecked American vehicles during the early advance into the Ardennes Forest. The resulting Battle of the Bulge nearly achieved its objective and ultimately ended in failure.

frontiers from all directions. And there seemed to be little the poorly equipped and disorganized remnants of his army could do to stop them.

There was more bad news. In their latest headlong retreat, the chief's soldiers had left completely unguarded a key border zone. Well known to all present as a traditional invasion route, this heavily wooded region was called the Ardennes.

Upon hearing the word "Ardennes," the chief abruptly raised his hand for silence. A long pause followed. Finally, he stood up





# OBJECTIVE ANTWERP

BY PATRICK J. CHAISSON

ADOLF HITLER'S DESPERATE GAMBLE RESULTING IN THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE CAME CLOSE TO SUCCEEDING.



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**American soldiers exit a landing craft on Omaha Beach early on the morning of D-Day, June 6, 1944. The Americans, along with British, Canadian, and other allies, were able to breach Hitler's vaunted Atlantic Wall in Normandy, and push the Germans back to the German border.**

and, eyes ablaze, announced in a firm voice: "I have made a momentous decision. I shall go over on the offensive, that is to say here," he stabbed at a map, "out of the Ardennes—with the objective Antwerp!"

Adolf Hitler's proclamation, made in his East Prussian command post on September 16, 1944, was indeed a momentous event. It led directly to Nazi Germany's last great strategic gamble in the West, an operation popularly labeled "The Battle of the Bulge" by generations of writers. For many, the words Hitler spoke that day serve to mark the campaign's starting point.

Yet, as U.S. Army historian Hugh M. Cole observes, it is unrealistic to believe this colossal encounter was fought "because the Führer had placed his finger on a map and made a pronouncement." The story of Hitler's high-stakes decision to risk the very existence of Germany on a desperate winter struggle is a fascinating glimpse into the Third Reich's military, political, and economic circumstances during the second half of 1944.

Understanding the Ardennes offensive also requires an exploration into the mind of the man who conceived this operation, dictated its time, place, and objective, and later involved himself in virtually every detail of its execution. This man was Chancellor of Germany and supreme commander of her armed forces: Adolf Hitler.

His challenges in mounting this attack were many. Five years of war had taken an alarming human toll on the Reich. Some 3,750,000 of Germany's best soldiers had already been killed, captured, wounded, or gone missing, and while 10 million men and women still wore its uniform the combat effectiveness of those remaining diminished with every military setback.

Setbacks there were, and in 1944 these came at a dizzying speed. During June and July the Red Army ripped a hole 100 miles wide and 200 miles deep into Hitler's Ukrainian front. This summer offensive—codenamed Operation Bagration—resulted in the annihilation of his 9th, 4th, and 3rd Panzer Armies along with 500,000 Wehrmacht soldiers.

The Soviets struck again in August, this time along the Danube River in Romania. Within two weeks Russian armies obliterated another 16 German divisions while inflicting 380,000 casualties. This calamity prompted the Romanian government on August 23 to switch sides—the first of several such defections the Third Reich would suffer that season.

Next to abandon Germany was Bulgaria, quitting the Axis camp on September 8. As a result the Wehrmacht, its flank no longer tenable, evacuated Greece. Still worse, all Nazi forces were made to leave Finland after September 15, when that nation signed an armistice with the Soviet Union.

Aside from whatever military support these former allies were no longer providing Germany, the loss of their raw materials severely hampered the Reich's war production effort. Gone were Ukrainian manganese, Yugoslavian copper, Finnish nickel, Belgian steel, and French bauxite. Supplies of Turkish chrome, Spanish tungsten, and Swedish iron ore became increasingly uncertain as these neutral powers began to reevaluate their relationships with Hitler's regime.

Most troubling to Albert Speer, Germany's brilliant head of war production, was the forfeiture of Romania's oil fields. A modern, mechanized army could not fight without petroleum, and the Luftwaffe—Hitler's once feared air force—was now mostly grounded due to fuel shortages. In September Speer advised his Führer that the Reich had stockpiled raw

materials sufficient for just one more year of war, providing no more territory was lost.

By this point, however, Germany was surrendering territory on almost every front. After successfully assaulting the Normandy coast on June 6, British, Canadian, and American armies began pouring onto the European continent. During July and August, the Western Allies broke clear of their beachheads and began a rapid advance across France and Belgium. Paris was liberated by August 25, Brussels nine days later, and the port of Antwerp fell on September 4.

After Allied troops moving out of Normandy linked up with another invasion force from southern France, the Wehrmacht could no longer offer a coherent defense against them. With most of their equipment destroyed, thousands of desperate soldiers began streaming east toward Germany. The collapse in France was both sudden and total.

It was an utter disaster for Hitler's legions in the West. From Holland, across Belgium, and down to the Swiss border, there remained almost no organized force able to combat the rampaging Anglo-Americans. Seemingly all the Western Allies had to do was make one final push directly into the heart of an unprotected Germany and end the war.

Any national leader, when faced with military threats such as these, would have good cause for concern. Adolf Hitler, however, remained unworried, even confident in the face of catastrophe on both the Eastern and Western Fronts during the first weeks of September 1944. This was partially due to the Führer's unbridled optimism and confidence in Germany and her people. Another important factor was his belief in the force of will, notably his own.

As Hitler himself explained that summer, "My task has been to never lose my nerve under any circumstances.... I live for the single task of leading this struggle because I know if there is not a man who by his very nature has a will of iron, then the struggle cannot be won."

The Führer's willpower was sorely tested when assassins detonated a bomb in his East Prussia headquarters, named the Wolfsschanze (Wolf's Lair), shortly after noon on July 20. While the explosion failed to kill its intended target, Hitler did sustain significant physical and psychological injuries. He was partially deafened, his right eardrum perforated and bleeding. Inner ear trouble affected Hitler's balance; for months he exhibited signs of vertigo. A lacerated right arm stubbornly refused to heal.

Whether due to the bomb blast or his own unhealthy lifestyle, Hitler began complaining of stomach cramps, occasionally so severe he could not function normally. He also expe-

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ABOVE: Hitler supports his injured arm in the wake of the failed assassination attempt at Wolf's Lair on July 20, 1944. To his left is Party Secretary Martin Bormann and to his right is Luftwaffe chief Hermann Göring. OKW commander Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel is next to Göring. BOTTOM: A Red Army soldier inspects the hulls of a pair of German tanks knocked out by Soviet weapons during the 1944 offensive codenamed Operation Bagration. The Soviets attacked through Belorussia and cleared German forces from eastern Poland.

rienced insomnia, sinus headaches, and an uncontrollable shaking in his extremities. During the course of six days in mid-September, he suffered three minor coronary episodes—one occurring just hours before the meeting in which he announced his decision to attack out of the Ardennes.

The assassination attempt affected him mentally as well. Hitler's paranoia increased—all his food had to be tasted before he would eat it, and visitors to the Wolfsschanze were searched for hidden weapons before being allowed to enter. No one, not even the Führer's closest advisers, could bring a briefcase or sidearm inside his headquarters complex.

Growing increasingly mistrustful of his generals, some of whom were behind the bomb plot, he now saw disloyalty in any act other than unquestioning obedience. Hitler had long believed that only he could save Germany from its enemies; now he was sure of it. "After my miraculous escape from death today," he informed a visiting Benito Mussolini that evening, "I am more than ever convinced that it is my fate to bring this [war] to a triumphant conclusion."

Hitler also regarded himself as a strategic genius. Early luck supported this delu-

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sion; in the Führer's mind all of Germany's recent military defeats were attributable to traitorous Army officers who had deliberately thwarted his brilliant operational plans. Increasingly it was Hitler's intuition, not sound military strategy, that directed the Reich's war effort.

After July 20, Nazi officials began involving themselves with martial matters. Immediately following the assassination attempt SS Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler got himself named commander of the Replacement Army, or Ersatzheer. Already heading most of Germany's internal security agencies, Himmler now oversaw its means of raising new military forces. Other political chieftains, notably Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels and Party Secretary Martin Bormann, started attending daily situation conferences in the Wolfsschanze as a means of furthering their own agendas.

Hitler did keep within his inner circle several members of the armed forces who still retained his confidence. Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel continued to serve as chief of the Führer's Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OKW), or supreme military headquarters. It was largely a symbolic post. There was no doubt that Adolf Hitler really ran things, whereas Keitel merely carried out his chief's bidding.

In fact, Keitel's haughty, authoritarian manner masked a weak-minded bureaucrat, ever eager to win his Führer's approval. So transparent was the field marshal's toadying that other members of Hitler's staff secretly called him "Lakeitel," a play on his name that means "lackey."

Far more able was Colonel General Alfred Jodl, head of OKW's operations division. Dour, taciturn, yet totally devoted to his Führer, Jodl's unenviable task was to transform Hitler's rambling, often incoherent directives into proper military orders. Surprisingly, these two worked well together.

As a member of Adolf Hitler's immediate entourage, Jodl was never far from the chief. During the summer of 1944, this meant living and working in a steel-rein-



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**ABOVE:** As the fortunes of war turned against Nazi Germany, Hitler became increasingly more reclusive. Allied bombers attacked German cities and industrial centers day and night, turning them to rubble while the Führer remained essentially out of sight. In this photo, Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress bombers of the U.S. Army Air Forces attack the city of Schweinfurt in the summer of 1944. **OPPOSITE:** The Nazi capital of Berlin is seen following the end of World War II. Such scenes of devastation were commonplace across Germany in 1945; however, war production under Reich Minister of Armaments Albert Speer continued, some industry moving underground or inside the protection of mountain caves.

forced bunker complex near Gorlitz, East Prussia. Jodl despised the Wolfsschanze, calling it a combination monastery and concentration camp, while his work schedule—tied to the Führer's odd sleep habits—could not have been less productive.

A typical day for Hitler began no earlier than 11 AM. After waking and dressing, he then met Jodl for a private briefing in his subterranean quarters. This was followed at 1 PM by the daily military conference, which could last for hours. Then he ate a vegetarian meal, took a siesta, and went straight into the evening's situation update. Often with Jodl by his side, the Führer normally worked straight through the night before returning to bed at 5 AM.

It had been months since Hitler had seen any region of Germany apart from his isolated military headquarters in East Prussia or the relatively unscathed Bavarian resort town of Berchtesgaden. The charismatic leader who once enthralled thousands of loyal Germans with his rallies and speeches had almost completely cut himself off from the public. All he knew of the Third Reich's military situation was what his few trusted advisers told him—and these *jaleute* (yes-people) knew what fate awaited staff officers who brought their Führer unpleasant news.

By the late summer of 1944, those nearest him quietly began to question Hitler's sanity, noting how after July's assassination attempt his decisions were becoming increasingly erratic. "He lost himself more and more in a world of theories which had no basis in reality," said General Heinz Guderian, in charge of the war against Russia. And General Walter Warlimont, Jodl's deputy on the operations staff, added, "It seemed as if the shock [of the blast] had brought into the open all the evil of his nature, both physical and psychological."

Despite his mental decline, Hitler recognized that only a political solution to the current crisis would bring lasting peace for Germany. His generals thought in operational terms; their perspective extended only as far as the success or failure of their next military campaign. The Führer, however, sought to impose his will on the alliance of nations

joined against him. But which of his admittedly formidable adversaries could, with a battlefield defeat, be forced to leave the war?

Although American President Franklin D. Roosevelt had declared the Allies would accept nothing short of Germany's unconditional surrender, Hitler in mid-1944 began to perceive cracks in the Western coalition. From various sources, his intelligence analysts learned of growing friction between Allied Supreme Commander Dwight D. Eisenhower and his generals as they competed for increasingly scarce resources during the drive across France and Belgium. Sensing an opportunity, the Führer instructed his propaganda minister, Goebbels, to exploit these perceived fissures between the British, Canadian, and American partners.

Goebbels also initiated several public relations programs he hoped would "awaken the German people to the approaching peril." A mandatory 60-hour work week took effect while industry deemed not essential to the war effort was closed down. Government officials also shuttered all theaters and universities. Providing much of the muscle that shifted Germany's economy into high gear were seven million prisoners and foreign workers—one fourth of the nation's labor force—toiling in mines, factories, and farms.

Despite enduring a strategic bombing campaign that terrorized the populace and led to severe shortages in medicine, synthetic rubber, and petroleum, German war production actually reached its peak output (except in oil and aircraft) during the summer of 1944. These numbers seemed reassuring, but would they be enough to replace combat losses as well as to outfit the new formations that Hitler was demanding?

Himmler, recently appointed as head of the Replacement Army, was ordered to raise 25 new Volksgrenadier (People's Infantry) divisions, a new type of organization in which significantly increased firepower was intended to compensate for lower troop strengths. He ruthlessly combed out rear-area garrisons, as well as prisons and hospitals, to find men for these formations.

All healthy German males aged 16 to 60 were now eligible for conscription, while the service exemptions once enjoyed by high-ranking Nazi families had mostly evaporated. By mid-August, Himmler's efforts produced 450,000 new soldiers (many of whom actually came from the Luftwaffe or Kriegsmarine), with another 250,000 in the process of being trained.

These achievements, briefed to Hitler by his coterie of Nazi advisers, certainly inspired in him a measure of hope. More good news reached the Wolfsschanze during early Sep-



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tember when OKW reported a curious "deceleration" in the Western Allies' advance. Quite literally the British and American armies had run out of gas—in some cases within sight of the German frontier. This logistical crisis, coupled with a similar quiet in the East, allowed Germany the briefest of respites to organize and reconstitute its forces.

Hitler now had breathing room, a chance to develop the concept he believed would split the Allied coalition and win victory in the West. Once free to focus solely on the Eastern Front, a resurgent Wehrmacht—aided by new wonder weapons then in development—could in Hitler's mind easily regain the initiative against Russian forces.

The first evidence of the strategic vision that would eventually culminate in Hitler's Ardennes offensive dates back to November 1943. In a staff conference, the Führer declared the West was his decisive theater of operations. He said the overall situation would change little if his armies destroyed 30 of the Red Army's 500 divisions, but should the Wehrmacht wreck 30 British or American divisions—one third of their eventual combat power in Europe—the Western Allies were certain to sue for peace on Germany's terms.

Hitler amplified this view during a situation briefing held on July 31, 1944. Opening with an acknowledgement of the threats now looming on all fronts, he recognized that Wehrmacht forces might eventually have to abandon France. The Führer also confessed that it was at present impossible to combat Anglo-American supremacy in the air. Germany needed time, he claimed, to form new panzer divisions and jet fighter squadrons.

Afterward, Hitler kept Jodl and Warlimont back for a private conference. In a long monologue he more fully explained his idea of a climactic battle fought against the Western Allies in which Germany's destiny would be decided. He next directed Jodl to form a small planning cell charged with examining options for such a counterattack in the West, further requiring all present to maintain absolute secrecy.

This initial guidance was admittedly broad. During the following weeks, however, more definitive directives began to appear. Meeting with his military advisers and Production Minister Speer on August 19, the Führer ordered that a force of 25 new divisions be assembled for a decisive blow in the West. This campaign was to occur during November or December, when bad weather would negate Allied air superiority.

A few weeks later, on August 31, Hitler again addressed the scope of his strategic objectives. “We shall continue this fight,” he vowed, “until—as Frederick the Great said—one of our accursed enemies becomes too weak to fight on.” The Führer continued, “There will be moments in which the tension between the Allies will become so great the break will happen. Coalitions in world history have always been ruined at some point.”

“The time is not ripe for a political solution,” he then cautioned. “To hope for a favorable political moment to do something during a time of severe military defeats is naturally childish and naïve. Such moments can present themselves only when you have successes.”

Over the next several weeks Hitler met frequently with his chief military planner, Alfred Jodl, to outline the operation. Together they pored over maps while discussing the attack’s timing, direction, breadth, and depth. Finally, on September 16, the Führer was ready to reveal his momentous decision. Accompanying Hitler in his stuffy conference room were Keitel, Jodl, Guderian, SS Gruppenführer Hermann Fegelein (Himmler’s liaison officer), General Walther Buhle of the OKW, Ambassador Walther Hewel (chief diplomatic representative), and acting Luftwaffe chief of staff General Werner Kreipe.

It was a major strategic gathering. According to British military historian Peter Caddick-Adams, Hitler’s decision to announce his Ardennes offensive to this particular audience was a political gesture and not done for military reasons. The Führer needed to keep his grip on Germany, and this proclamation demonstrated

to all present (the military, the diplomatic corps, and especially the SS) that he was still in control, that the war effort under his command retained direction and purpose.

Adolf Hitler further believed a stunning military victory would restore Germany to its former position of preeminence in world affairs. Such a triumph would also do much to maintain his personal hold on power. All that remained was to gather the forces necessary for a successful surprise attack.

First, a commander had to be found who could assemble and inspire the broken remnants of Hitler’s Western armies. This officer was Field Marshal Walther Model, nicknamed “The Führer’s Fireman” for his hard-driving ability to blunt enemy advances in the East. Model reported for duty on August 16, serving temporarily as Commander-in-Chief West as well as head of Army Group B.

Hitler then recalled the Reich’s “grand old soldier,” Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt, from enforced retirement on September 1. The 68-year-old veteran dutifully accepted command of Oberbefehlshaber (OB) West—a position from which he was fired in July—allowing Model to focus on tactical matters within Army Group B. Hitler hoped Rundstedt’s unsullied reputation with the troops and insistence on strict obedience would serve as a positive example to his forces in the West.

The Führer also began naming officers to command those armies leading his counterattack. On the same day he restored Rundstedt to duty as chief of OB West, Hitler promoted the scrappy Baron Freiherr Hasso von Manteuffel to General der Panzertruppen and named him as commander of the 5th Panzer Army. Two days later he placed General Erich Brandenberger in charge of the 7th Army.

The last army-level command change occurred on September 14, when SS-Oberst-Gruppenführer Josef “Sepp” Dietrich took over the 6th Army (renamed 6th Panzer Army on November 8). The selection of this well-connected but barely competent SS general to lead the 6th Army—spearhead of the entire Ardennes offensive—demonstrates how low the Führer’s stock in his army officer corps had fallen.

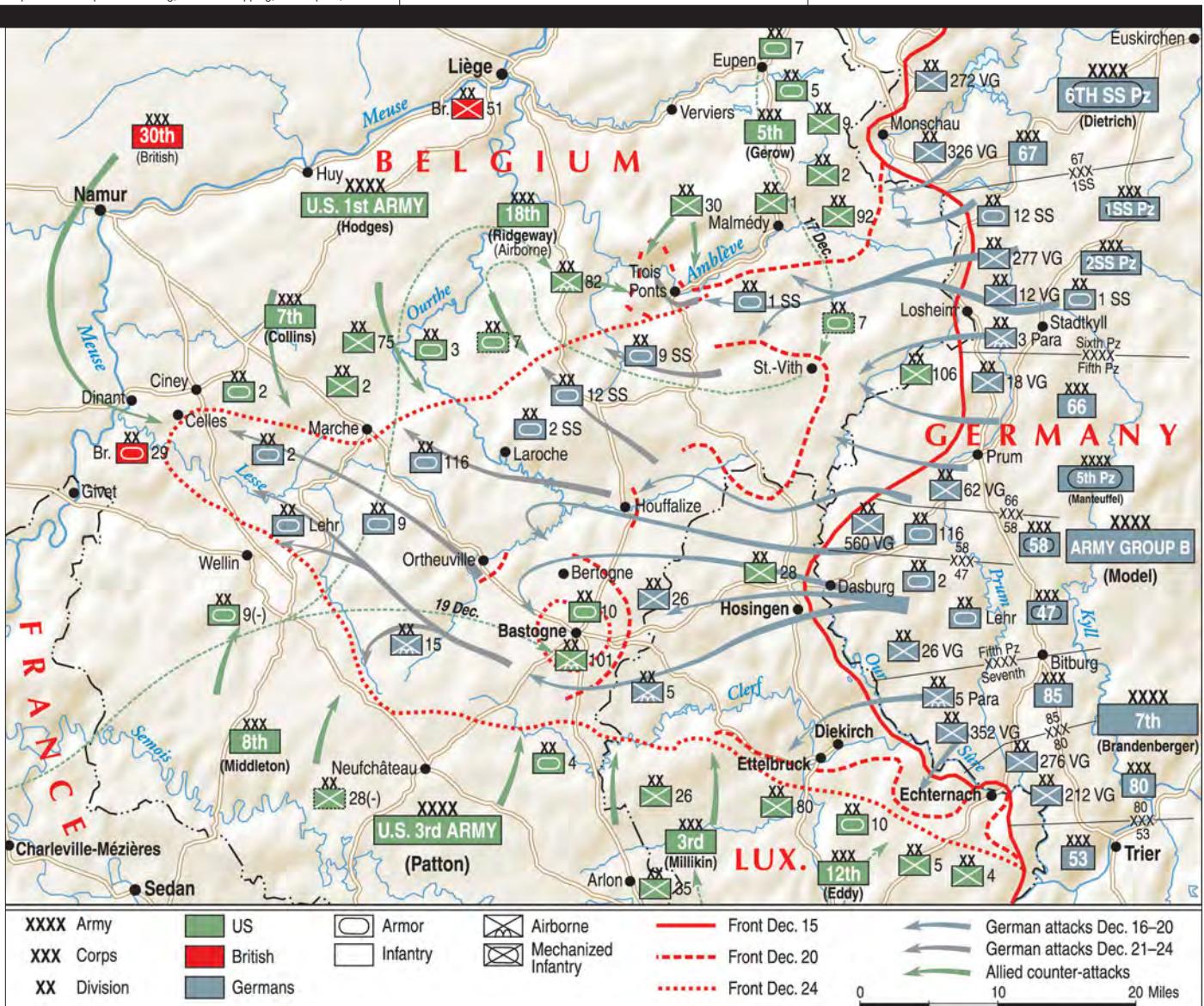
None of the men destined to carry out Hitler’s grand campaign in the West had any idea such an operation was being contemplated. Orders emanating from the distant Wolfsschanze merely directed them to begin rebuilding their formations with whatever means were available. Yet little could be obtained to replace what was lost in France; Wehrmacht High Command needed every new soldier, rifle, and tank for the 25 Volksgrenadier divisions on tap to lead the top-secret winter offensive then being planned.

It was a physically exhausted, careworn Adolf Hitler who on September 25 directed Jodl to draw up a formal directive for the Ardennes offensive. The members of his household entourage were shocked by their Führer’s appearance of late, commenting among themselves how aged, ill, and strained he now looked. That afternoon Hitler fell ill with jaundice and was confined to his bed for 10 days. Traudl Junge, Hitler’s 24-year-old private secretary, later wrote of her chief’s steady decline: “It was as if his

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**Two young Volksgrenadiers, captured during fighting late in the war, stand under guard. The boy on the right wears the Swastika-emblazoned armband of the Hitler Youth. As German manpower ebbed away, Hitler pressed old men and boys into the military.**



body ... had gone on strike."

With their meddling Führer out of the picture for a while, Jodl's planners quickly produced an operational outline. Its major points included a large-scale attack launching out of the Ardennes Forest sometime in late November 1944, with the initial object of seizing bridges over the Meuse River near Liege, Belgium. There would follow a battle designed to cut the British and Canadians off from their supply hubs, thus forcing an Allied evacuation of the Continent much in the manner of Dunkirk.

Jodl's scheme further specified a massive pre-assault bombardment followed by three armies—two armored vanguards and an infantry formation providing flank security—advancing rapidly across a 60-mile front. Their final objective, 125 miles away, was the port of Antwerp. Success, Jodl postulated, would depend on bad flying weather to keep Allied air assets on the ground, total secrecy, and the Allies' inability to react in time.

Two days later Jodl delivered to his chief the draft document, which he called Operation Christrose (Christmas Rose). Hitler instantly renamed it Wacht am Rhein, a bit of deception in case enemy spies caught wind of the scheme. His codename, translated as "Watch on the Rhine," implied a defensive action, perhaps a reference to the West Wall, or Siegfried Line.

This chain of fortifications, recently refurbished by 211,000 civilian workers and slave

The German Ardennes offensive created a huge salient in the American lines and nearly succeeded in crossing the River Meuse toward its ultimate objective, the Belgian port city of Antwerp.

laborers, represented the Wehrmacht's main line of resistance in the West. Conventional military logic dictated a static defense behind the West Wall was Germany's only possible response against fast-approaching Anglo-American forces. But by now the Third Reich's high command was not guided by logic.

A revitalized Führer took Albert Speer aside on October 12 with news of his counterattack. After swearing the Armaments Minister to complete secrecy, Hitler demanded he raise a corps of construction engineers tasked with building bridges all

through the rugged Ardennes. Dismissing Speer's logistical concerns, the Führer remarked, "Everything else must be put aside for the sake of this, no matter what the consequences. This will be the great blow which must succeed."

He fixed Speer with his glittering stare: "A single breakthrough on the Western Front!" Hitler exclaimed. "You'll see! It will lead to collapse and panic among the Americans. We'll drive right through their middle and take Antwerp. Then they'll have lost their supply port. And a tremendous pocket will encircle the entire English Army, with hundreds of thousands of prisoners."

Hitler then began initiating his field officers into the plan. Among the first to hear of Nazi Germany's winter offensive was the Führer's favorite commando, SS Obersturmbannführer Otto Skorzeny. The tall Austrian got word of Wacht am Rhein directly from his commander in chief on October 21 when Hitler directed Skorzeny to raise a special operations unit called Panzer Brigade 150. Skorzeny's men, many dressed and equipped as Americans, were to infiltrate the lines, seize key objectives, and spread panic throughout the U.S. rear area.

Reporting to the Wolfsschanze the next morning were Generals Siegfried Westphal and Hans Krebs, chiefs of staff to Rundstedt and Model, respectively. Neither knew why they had been summoned to supreme headquarters, their sense of dread increasing when each man was made to sign a secrecy oath threatening *Sippenhaft*—the punishment of family members—should he discuss what was about to be revealed.

Westphal and Krebs entered a meeting room where Hitler and Jodl briefed them in detail on the Ardennes campaign. They were also told to conserve as many forces in the West as possible for this attack, fighting all necessary defensive battles with a minimum number of troops. Then, before either officer could ask questions, the two were whisked away with instructions to inform their commanders of the mission.

When Wacht am Rhein was described to Rundstedt, he thought the idea "a stroke

of genius" but realized Germany no longer possessed the means necessary to execute such a radical scheme. Calling the operation "a map fantasy," he noted that "all, absolutely all conditions for the possible success of such an offensive were lacking."

Model, for his part, reportedly thundered, "This plan doesn't have a damned leg to stand on!" Yet orders were orders, and those officers charged with implementing the Führer's Ardennes offensive immediately began making their own tactical preparations.

Rundstedt and Model met with the three commanders who would carry out Wacht am Rhein on October 27, when Manteuffel, Dietrich, and Brandenberger arrived at Model's headquarters for a conference. During this gathering, which was held without Hitler's knowledge, all present frankly discussed the operation's failings: inadequate forces to accomplish the assigned mission, insufficient supplies, impossibly long flanks, a poor road network, and finally, no regard at all for the enemy's response to German actions.

Sepp Dietrich, assigned to command the main effort, summed up his objections with typical dark humor: "All I had to do was to cross a river, capture Brussels, and then go on to take Antwerp. All this in the worst time of the year through the Ardennes where the snow is waist-deep and there wasn't room to deploy four tanks abreast, let alone armored divisions. Where it doesn't get light until eight and it's dark again at four, and with reformed divisions made up chiefly of kids and sick old men. And all this at Christmas time!"

Both Rundstedt and Model, independent of one another, began to consider how Wacht am Rhein might be modified to contain more achievable goals. At the October 27 conference each officer presented his thoughts, which Model synthesized into one course of action labeled *die kleine Lösung* (the Small Solution). The field marshal's staff packaged this alternative into a formal proposal, which was then submitted to OKW under the codename Herbstnebel (Autumn Mist).

Hitler's headquarters ignored these recommendations, sending instead on November 2 another set of detailed instructions. Titled "Operation Wacht am Rhein—Order for Assembly and Concentration for Attack (Ardennes Offensive)," the directives contained a cover note that read, "This plan is unalterable in every detail."

Repeated protests from Rundstedt and Model failed to change their Führer's mind on this issue. On November 10, Hitler signed the final operations order, which again made no mention of the *Kleine Lösung* his field commanders were suggesting. Yet the generals refused to give up.

During a visit by Alfred Jodl to OB West on November 26, Rundstedt and Model once more pressed the Small Solution. Acknowledging their considerable combat experience while remaining obedient to his chief, Jodl admitted Wacht am Rhein was an extremely daring venture. "We were in a desperate situation," he told them, "and the only way to save it was by a desperate decision. By remaining on the defensive, we could not hope to escape the evil fate hanging over us. It was an act of desperation, but we had to risk everything."

"Anyway," Jodl concluded, "there can be no arguments—it is the Führer's orders!"

The inevitable clash of wills between Hitler and his army commanders took place on December 2 during a six-hour staff meeting in Berlin. In attendance were some 50 officers, including Westphal (representing Rundstedt), Model, Manteuffel, and Dietrich, along with the Führer, Keitel, and Jodl. Model, whose opinion Hitler still valued, urged his chief to reconsider the counterattack's far-reaching objectives. He then outlined his proposal, Herbstnebel, which would recapture the city of Aachen and thus stabilize matters in the West.

Hitler said no. The generals' *Kleine Lösung* would not accomplish his political goal, he insisted, but instead only prolong the war. "If we succeed," he continued, "we will have knocked out half the enemy front. Then we'll see what happens."



**On the morning of December 16, 1944, SS troops of Kampfgruppe Peiper advance as the spearhead of General Sepp Dietrich's Sixth Panzer Army. Under the command of SS Lieutenant Colonel Joachim Peiper, these troops committed atrocities during their drive toward the Meuse, massacring prisoners at Malmedy and other locations. Peiper's spearhead was halted at La Gleize on December 24, ending the Germans' best hope for success in the Battle of the Bulge.**

As a sop to Field Marshal Model, the Führer renamed his offensive Autumn Mist, though it still specified the long 125-mile drive on Antwerp. Hitler approved Operation Herbstnebel on December 9, his implementation order bearing the now familiar warning: "Not to be Altered."

The next day Hitler moved into his Alderhorst (Eagle's Nest) command post, located near Bad Nauheim in western Germany. Here, during two separate briefings on December 11 and 12, the Führer met with those division commanders who would execute Herbstnebel. The atmosphere was tense, even surreal. Each officer was searched by SS guards before being stripped of his sidearm and briefcase. Inside the conference room more SS sentries stood stone faced behind the generals, who were shocked by their commander in chief's physical deterioration once Hitler made his entrance.

"He seemed near collapse," one man later recalled. "His shoulders drooped and his left arm shook as he walked." But those who remembered the old Hitler saw that master orator return briefly. Eyes blazing, he raged, whispered, and lectured for over two hours. Speaking about the coalition arrayed against him, Germany's Führer predicted a bloodletting in the Ardennes that would cause the Western Front to "suddenly collapse with a huge clap of thunder."

Hitler closed his remarks by exhorting the assembled commanders to help him save Germany from its enemies, finally assuring them, "We will yet be masters of our fate." These officers, many of whom left the conference mesmerized by his performance, then returned to their units to make final preparations. The operation was now set for December 16, and much had to be done beforehand.

Seven panzer divisions, two panzer brigades, and 13 infantry divisions—200,000

men—secretly moved into position opposite the unsuspecting Americans. Matériel stockpiled for Herbstnebel included 970 armored fighting vehicles, 800 aircraft, 1,900 artillery pieces and rocket projectors, 16,000 tons of ammunition, and 4,500,000 gallons of fuel. Fifty thousand horses also were on hand to support the advance.

From his Alderhorst headquarters, Adolf Hitler issued final attack instructions to Field Marshals Rundstedt and Model during the afternoon of December 15. "If you comply with these basic operational guidelines," he promised, "a great victory is certain." Then, as was his habit, the Führer busied himself with work far into the night. He finally went to sleep at 5 AM on Saturday, December 16, 1944.

Thirty minutes later, a massive artillery barrage opened Hitler's Ardennes offensive, an offensive that began with optimism and ended in catastrophic failure, hastening the defeat of Nazi Germany.

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# LIFE AND DEATH IN THE Führerbunker

**H**is world was literally crashing down in flames around him. Adolf Hitler's Third Reich, which he had created out of nothing but his own will—an empire that he had once boasted would last for a millennium—was on fire and being torn apart by shot and shell, besieged on all sides. It was an apocalyptic scene straight out of the Wagnerian opera *Die Göttterdammerung—The Twilight of the Gods*.

The once stately city of Berlin was little more than flaming husks of buildings. Worse, the enemy Hitler hated and feared—the Red Army—was practically at his doorstep.

It was the end of April 1945. As he sat in the dank gloom of the Führerbunker deep beneath the garden of the Chancellery in Berlin, Hitler no doubt reflected on all that had happened to him and to Germany in the past 12 months, almost all of it bad.

Back in April 1944, the British and Americans in Italy were still bottled up at Anzio and along the Gustav Line that ran through Monte Cassino, but his commanders had warned him that the situation would not remain a stalemate for much longer; the German troops no longer had the strength to destroy the enemy there.

On the Eastern Front, defeat followed defeat. Hundreds of thousands of German soldiers lay dead or were in Soviet POW camps where most of them would starve to death. As the German Army in the East became weaker, the Red Army became stronger.

Then, in June, the Western Allies had poured across the English Channel in unstoppable waves and had crashed through the so-called "Atlantic Wall" that Germany had spent years and millions of Reichsmarks building as though it had been made out of cardboard.

In July, some of his own traitorous officers had tried to kill him with a bomb at his East Prussia headquarters.

Then came the disasters, thick and fast in the West: the loss of France, Belgium, Holland, and Luxembourg. Only in Holland in September did Hitler win a brief reprieve.

The winter of 1944-1945 was no better. Operation Wacht am Rhein—the German counteroffensive that the Allies called the Battle of the Bulge—had petered out without achieving its goals; tens of thousands of irreplaceable men (not to mention irreplaceable guns and tanks) had been lost.

BY FLINT WHITLOCK





In this dramatized painting of the postwar era, a crazed Hitler is depicted in the Führerbunker along with three German officers, apparently drunk, one of whom has his suitcase packed. The painting was completed around 1948 and is attributed to "Kukryniksy," the name of three Communist artists who produced political posters during the 1930s and 1940s.

The Third Reich that Hitler boasted would last a thousand years ended in a series of dismal concrete rooms deep beneath the blazing ruins of Berlin.

The once mighty German Navy was hors d'combat, either holed up in ports or lying at the bottom of the sea. The deadly U-boats no longer dominated the waves.

Food and other supplies for the civilian population were also rapidly running out, and the country's infrastructure was a shambles.

The British and American air forces continued to decimate German cities and industries from the sky, badly crippling tank and aircraft production. Fuel for the planes and panzers was in such short supply that synthetic fuel manufacturing plants had been built deep inside mountains. In May 1944, the Germans had produced 156,000 tons of aviation fuel; by January 1945, thanks to Allied bombing, it had dropped to 11,000 tons.

Germany's "wonder weapons" that had once seemed so promising—the V1 and V2 rockets and the jet planes—had failed to achieve that promise. And the development of an atomic bomb was barely beyond the experimental stage.

And, despite the SS's best efforts, not all

of the Jews had been exterminated.

Yet, Hitler and a few of his minions still clung to hope—hope that the Americans and British would come to their senses and realize that their common enemy was not Nazi Germany but Stalin's Soviet Union. Perhaps, Hitler believed, they could still be persuaded to join forces with Germany and throw back the Slavic hordes before they overran all of civilization.

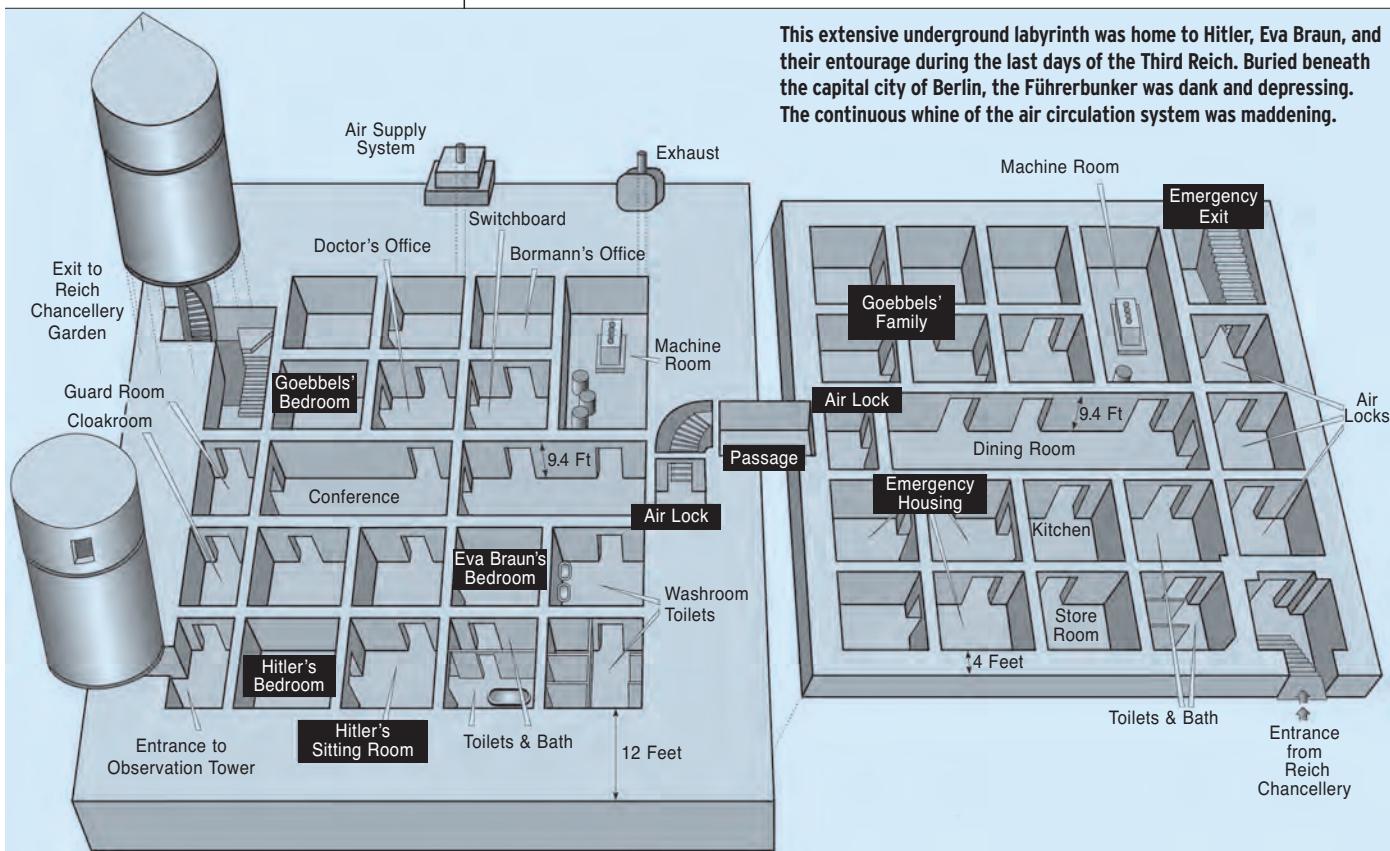
Hitler's armies, which had once been within striking distance of Moscow, had seen the tables turned. Wehrmacht forces had been steadily pushed back until their remnants were now fighting at a place called Seelow Heights, 40 miles east of Berlin.

Long rows of Russian cannons sitting hub to hub fired their projectiles into German positions. Soviet tanks, accompanied by infantrymen, sprang from their hiding places and pushed forward, steamrolling over all opposition in their way. The handwriting was on the wall, and it was written in blood.

Studying the situation map during his daily meetings with the few officers who remained in the bunker, Hitler, living in "cloud coo-coo land," as one officer once put it, demanded that so-and-so general or field marshal move such-and-such division or army from there to here.

His sycophantic entourage had not the courage to explain that so-and-so general or field marshal had been killed or captured or could no longer be reached by radio or courier. Similarly, no one dared mention that such-and-such division or army no longer existed. The officers, knowing the end was near, merely clicked their heels and said, "Jawohl, mein Führer," and pretended to carry out the hopeless orders.

On April 13 Hitler received word that the Red Army of Marshal Fyodor Tolbukhin had taken Vienna. Counteracting the bad news that day was a shot of good news: American President Franklin Roosevelt had died. Joseph Goebbels, the Third Reich's propaganda minister, phoned Hitler, crowing, "Mein Führer, I congratulate you! Roosevelt is dead. It is written."



**RIGHT:** One of Hitler's adjutants, Julius Schaub, gestures to the despondent Führer in the purportedly last photo of the Nazi leader before he committed suicide on April 30, 1945. Slumped in an ill-fitting great coat, Hitler is surveying the ruins of the Reich Chancellery. **BELow:** Located beneath the garden of the Reich Chancellery, the Führerbunker was built in secrecy and served its purpose to the end. This photo depicts the entrance to the bunker at left adjacent to the bomb shelter that was used by guards posted there.



Both: National Archives



ten in the stars that the second half of April will be the turning point for us."

The next day, however, Goebbels' elation dissipated as reports came in from the various fronts showing that nothing had really changed on the battlefield. He confessed to his staff, "Perhaps Fate has again been cruel and made fools of us. Perhaps we counted our chickens before they hatched."

General Dwight D. Eisenhower had already decided to leave the capture of Berlin to the Russians. For one thing, as he told U.S. Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall, the Red Army was already closer to Berlin than either the American or British armies were.

For another, Ike knew that the Germans were likely to defend their capital to the last cartridge and could not see expending hundreds of thousands of American or British lives in taking an objective that had more political than military value.

"I regard it as militarily unsound," Eisenhower told Marshall. "I am the first to admit that a war is waged in pursuance of political aims, and if the combined chiefs of staff should decide that the Allied effort to take Berlin outweighs purely military considerations in this theater, I would cheerfully readjust my plans and my thinking so as to carry out such an operation."

Ike was not ordered to readjust his plans or thinking. In the end, it would be the Soviets who would pay a tremendous price for the "honor" of taking Berlin.

Hitler swung between two moods. Part of the time he was delusional, believing that somehow some unforeseen event would tilt the war in Germany's favor. On other days he was rational and realistic, fully realizing that the war was lost.

To prepare for the latter, on April 15 Hitler wrote out orders that, in the event the enemy severed communication between him and the rest of the command, Admiral Karl Dönitz would take command of the northern forces while Field Marshal Albert Kesselring would take command in the west and south.

It was not the first time Hitler had made a realistic assessment of the situation. Six months earlier, when Operation Wacht am Rhein was crumbling, he had told an aide, "I know the war is lost. The enemy superiority is too great."

He now dictated a proclamation addressed to the "Soldiers of the German Eastern Front."

It read in part, "For the last time, our deadly Jewish-Bolshevik enemy has lined up his masses for the attack. He is trying to smash Germany and exterminate our people. To a

great degree, you soldiers of the East know yourselves what fate is threatening all German women, girls, and children. While the old men and children will be murdered, women and girls will be degraded to barrack whores. The rest will be marched off to Siberia ...

"He who fails to do his duty at this time commits treason against our people. Any regiment or division that abandons its position acts so disgracefully that it should be ashamed before the women and children who are enduring the terror bombing against our cities ...

"Above all, be aware of the few treacherous officers and soldiers who, in order to save their own lives, will fight against us.... Whoever orders you to retreat must be immediately arrested and, if necessary, killed on the spot, no matter what his rank may be.

"If, in the coming days and weeks, every soldier does his duty at the Eastern Front, then the last Asian attack will be broken, just as the invasion of our enemies in the West will be broken in spite of everything.

"Berlin will remain German!"

On April 16, the Soviets' final attack was unleashed on Berlin along the Oder River front and in Silesia. The Red Army had gathered 2.5 million soldiers, 6,200 tanks and assault guns, 41,000 artillery pieces (250 guns for each kilometer of front), and

7,200 aircraft. Facing them was Army Group Vistula, with a paltry 200,000 men, 750 tanks and assault guns, and 1,500 artillery pieces.

Four days later, as the thud of artillery shells exploding in the rubble above the Führerbunker began beating an incessant, mournful rhythm, like the drums accompanying a man being marched to the gallows, Hitler celebrated his 56th birthday by emerging briefly from the Führerbunker to greet in the garden 20 Hitler Youth members who had earned the Iron Cross.

The existing newsreel of him, dressed in a heavy wool greatcoat, patting the shoulders and pinching the cheeks and ears of his youthful admirers, shows a broken, withered man trying to keep up a brave front.

Armin Lehrmann was one of the boy soldiers with whom Hitler had chatted that day. He recalled that Hitler "shook hands with everybody." But the famous voice was gone. "It was not an orator's voice. It almost sounded like he had a cold, and his eyes looked watery, and his voice didn't come across very strong."

As the Soviets smashed deeper into Germany, a wave of panic and hysteria overcame many of the civilians in their path, especially the women. Rumors and factual accounts of women and girls being gang-raped by drunken Red Army troops drove thousands of Germans to commit suicide. Many took poison, shot or hanged themselves, or threw themselves off cliffs or into rivers. In Berlin alone, in April and May, nearly 4,000 people killed themselves.

One 11-year-old girl who survived nearly being killed by her own mother to prevent her from falling into Russian hands, recalled, "We had no hope left for life, and I myself had the feeling that this was the end of the world, this was the end of my life." Somehow she survived.

At a meeting with his staff at the Propaganda Ministry, Goebbels voiced Hitler's complaint that he, the Führer, was surrounded by cowards and traitors, and that the German people were no longer worth fighting for. When someone dared to challenge that assertion, the minister lashed



**ABOVE LEFT:** As a trio of admiring young SS officers looks on in the background, Hitler stands with his long-time mistress Eva Braun, whom he married in the Führerbunker. This photo was apparently taken during happier times. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Hitler and his magnificent Alsatian, Blondi, are pictured together. Prior to taking poison, the Führer had the potency of the cyanide tested on the dog. It worked. **BELow:** This trio of Hitler confidantes came to different ends as the Third Reich collapsed. Aviatrix Hanna Reitsch (left) fled the capital and escaped capture by the Soviets. Her lover, General Robert Ritter von Greim (center), committed suicide after his capture. Hitler's personal secretary Traudl Junge (right) temporarily left Berlin but returned a month later and was arrested by the Red Army.



out: "The German people? What can you do with a people whose men are no longer willing to fight when their wives are being raped?"

"All the plans of National Socialism, all its dreams and goals, were too great and too noble for this people. The German people are just too cowardly to realize these goals. In the East, they are running away. In the West, they set up hindrances for their own soldiers and welcome the enemy with white flags." Bitterly, Goebbels spit out, "The German people deserve the destiny that now awaits them."

But he put on a mask for the sake of national morale. In his final broadcast to the German people, in case any of them were still listening, Goebbels declared, "The Führer is in Berlin and will die fighting with his troops in the capital."

The Führer may have been in Berlin but he had no intention of dying fighting with his troops on the barricades that now blocked many of the city's streets. He was hunkered down in his bombproof bunker below the garden of the Reich Chancellery, worrying about what the Russians would do with him if they captured him alive.

The Germans were highly skilled at building underground facilities of all sorts, and the Führerbunker was no exception, although it was anything but luxurious. It consisted of two levels of rooms. The bunker had been built in two phases, the first in 1936 and the

second in 1944. Hitler had moved into the underground chamber in January 1945, making only occasional forays to the outside since then.

The upper level (Vorbunker), beneath 13 feet of concrete, comprised a dozen small rooms (four of which were the kitchen) flanked by a central hallway. At the end of the hallway a spiral staircase wound its way down to Hitler's quarters.

Here were 18 rooms, also quite small, where Hitler and many of his staff lived and worked (Hitler and his mistress Eva Braun occupied six of the rooms), a far cry from the spacious and elegant offices in the Chancellery.

The passageway on this level doubled as an 18-square-foot conference room unadorned with decoration; a large table held a map of the combat areas. Found on this level, too, were the telephone exchange and a power-generating/ventilation station, along with bathrooms. A battalion of 600-700 SS men of the Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler were billeted nearby and served as guards, orderlies, clerks, servants, and cooks.

Besides Hitler and Eva, other residents of the bunker complex were Hitler's Machiavellian Deputy Führer Martin Bormann; Dr. Ludwig Stumpfegger, one of Heinrich Himmler's physicians who was now Hitler's; Goebbels' adjutant, Günther Schwägermann, and his undersecretary of state at the Ministry of Propaganda, Werner Naumann; plus Hitler's adjutant, his two secretaries, and his vegetarian cook.

At his last major conference on April 22, after learning that his orders for a counterattack had been disobeyed, Hitler flew into a tirade, spending hours venting his rage at the world, at the German people, and at the German officers and soldiers who had aban-

National Archives



ABOVE: Nazi Propaganda Minister Josef Goebbels and his wife Magda, a fanatical Nazi, pose with their children. As the Red Army closed in, Magda Goebbels had each of the children sedated and then crushed an ampule of cyanide between their teeth, killing them. She and her husband later committed suicide. Standing in the rear is Magda's son from a prior marriage, Luftwaffe Lieutenant Harald Quandt. He survived the war. RIGHT: American soldiers at left and troops of the Soviet Red Army stretch to shake hands across the remnants of a footbridge across the River Elbe in Germany. With the meeting at the town of Torgau on the banks of the Elbe, the Third Reich was split in two.

doned him and the Fatherland. Those who witnessed and listened to this venomous outpouring were truly frightened. Many thought the Führer had at last gone completely mad.

On that date, too, the eight-member Goebbels family moved from their apartment on Hermann-Göring-Strasse into quarters within the already overcrowded bunker. The diminutive propaganda minister assured his Führer that he and his family would remain faithful to the end.

After inflicting heavy casualties on the Soviets, the Germans abandoned Seelow Heights and pulled back toward the capital in an orderly fashion. On Monday, April 23, three days after Hitler's birthday, the Red Army penetrated the outer ring of defenses around Berlin.

Elsewhere around the city, the Germans gave as good as they got; 2,800 Soviet tanks were destroyed and thousands of Red Army soldiers were killed or wounded by the defense that was growing stiffer and more fanatical by the hour.

Events were rapidly coming to a head. April 25 saw U.S. and Soviet forces meet on the Elbe River, and that night Hanna Reitsch, the famed German aviator and test pilot, landed on an avenue near the Brandenburg Gate in beleaguered Berlin, carrying her lover, the newly appointed commander of the Luftwaffe, General Robert Ritter von Greim, to a meeting with Hitler.

With bits of concrete falling from the ceiling with each explosion above, and knowing that the Russians were closing in on the Chancellery, Reitsch pleaded with Magda Goebbels to allow him to fly the children to safety. "My God, Frau Goebbels," Reitsch

National Archives





Great Patriotic War Museum, Moscow

said, "the children cannot stay here, even if I have to fly in 20 times to get them out." Frau Goebbels refused.

On April 26 Magda dashed off a letter to her son from a previous marriage, Harald Quandt, a lieutenant in the Luftwaffe and a prisoner of war being held in Benghazi, Libya. Perhaps the letter would find its way to him.

She wrote: "My beloved son! By now we have been in the Führerbunker for six days already—daddy, your six little siblings and I, for the sake of giving our National Socialist lives the only possible honorable end.... You shall know that I stayed here against daddy's will, and that even on last Sunday the Führer wanted to help me to get out. You know your mother—we have the same blood, for me there was no wavering.

"Our glorious idea is ruined and with it everything beautiful and marvelous that I have known in my life. The world that comes after the Führer and National Socialism is no longer worth living in and therefore I took the children with me, for they are too good for the life that would follow, and a merciful God will understand me when I will give them the salvation...."

She gave the letter to Hanna Reitsch and asked her to deliver it if possible.

On the 26th, Tempelhof airport was captured by the Soviets, and most of Berlin's eastern, northeastern, and southern suburbs and districts had fallen to the enemy. Some of the major Nazi rats had already abandoned the sinking ship of state. Reichsmarschal and Luftwaffe chief Hermann Göring had the temerity to flee Berlin and then send Hitler a telegram declaring that, because he had heard that the Führer planned to commit suicide, he wanted permission to assume leadership of the Third Reich.

Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS and Gestapo, had also departed. He had been holding secret negotiations with Swedish diplomat Count Folke Bernadotte and, in a self-serving attempt to save his own skin, promised to release more than 30,000 prisoners from Nazi concentration camps.

A furious Hitler then condemned both Himmler and Göring for abandoning him. Albert Speer, Minister of Armaments, was in the bunker when Hitler exploded. Speer said, "An outburst of wild fury followed in which feelings of bitterness, helplessness, self-pity, and despair mingled," with Hitler blaming Göring for being lazy, corrupt, and a drug addict who "let the air force go to pot."

Then, said Speer, Hitler slumped back into lethargy and resignation: "Well, all right, let Göring negotiate the surrender. If the war is lost anyhow, it doesn't matter who does it." That sentence expressed contempt for the German people: Göring was still good enough for the purposes of capitulation."

Himmler was a different matter. Since the "faithful Heinrich" was out of Berlin and beyond Hitler's reach, the Führer took out his anger at the SS chief on Hermann Fegelein, Eva Braun's brother-in-law and Himmler's representative attached to Hitler's staff. Fegelein was arrested and executed on April 27.

Speer took his leave from the bunker and spent a few minutes in the Court of Honor in the darkened Chancellery that he had designed and built. Wistfully, he recalled, "Now I was leaving the ruins of my building, and of the most significant years of my life." He then escaped and flew off to Hamburg to join Dönitz at his headquarters at Plön in



Schleswig-Holstein.

On the 28th, Stalin's troops were within a mile of the Chancellery, which was crumbling under artillery, rockets, and aerial bombing. The next day, although the LVI Panzer Corps, defending the city, was almost out of ammunition, Hitler ordered it to fight to the last man.

The fighting in the streets of Berlin was approaching a climax. Soviet troops had reached the Tiergarten, once a royal hunting preserve, and artillery continued to pound the city, blowing apart what few walls remained standing. Dug into the rubble with panzerfausts and bolt-action rifles, the old men of the Volkssturm and the young boys of the Hitler Youth fought a losing battle against the better equipped Red Army troops.

Considerable postwar focus has been put on the Volkssturm and Hitler Youth as the major defenders of Berlin, but they were only a small part. While the LVI Panzer Corps fought in and around the city, the bulk of responsibility for coming to the rescue of Berlin was placed on the decimated Army Group Vistula's 9th Army, 21st Army, and Third Panzer Army. What was left of the 12th Army, too, was thrown into the breach at Potsdam. But even these units, badly depleted and demoralized, could not stop the overwhelming numbers and firepower of the Red Army that tightened the noose around the city.

Hanna Reitsch, still in the bunker, was also given letters from some of the other residents, plus instructions intended for Admiral Dönitz at Plön. Initially both Reitsch and von Greim vowed to stay and die with their Führer, but he ordered them to leave. On April 28, they flew out of Berlin, barely avoiding being shot down by the Russians.

The pair was later captured by the Red Army. Von Greim committed suicide on May 24, 1945. Reitsch would learn later that her father, so fearful of what the Soviets might do to his family, had killed his wife, Hanna's sister Heidi and her three children, and himself on May 3.

April 30 saw elements of the Soviet Third Shock Army break into the Reichstag building and engage in room-to-room combat with SS soldiers. Once all the defenders had been

This panoramic Soviet painting of the Battle of Berlin portrays the brutality and destruction of the fight for the Nazi capital. The Red Army lost thousands of killed and wounded in the struggle, and the German forces defending the city were virtually wiped out while civilians suffered terribly.

killed or captured, Red Army soldiers raised the blood-red Soviet flag atop the badly scarred building.

As the bunker shook and shuddered under ceaseless barrages, a pale and visibly trembling Hitler sat down with his secretary Traudl Junge and dictated his lengthy and rambling "political testament." Among other things, he appointed Dönitz the new president of the Third Reich. He then vowed that he would never to leave Berlin, preferring to remain to direct the defense of the city even if it cost him his life.

He said to Junge, "Since there are not enough forces to withstand the enemy attack at this point and our resistance is slowly being weakened by blinded and spineless characters, I wish to join my fate to that which millions of others have taken upon themselves and remain in this city. In addition, I do not wish to fall into the

hands of an enemy who, for the amusement of its incited masses, needs a new spectacle directed by the Jews."

Hitler gave Goebbels and his family permission to leave the bunker, but Goebbels and Magda decided to remain loyal to the bitter, ghoulish end, for they knew that if they were captured alive, theirs would be a most unpleasant fate.

In March, Magda Goebbels had confessed to her former sister-in-law, "We have demanded monstrous things from the German people and treated other nations with pitiless cruelty. For this the victors will exact their full revenge ... we can't let them think we are cowards. Everybody else has the right to live. We haven't got this right—we have forfeited it. I make myself responsible. I belonged. I believed in Hitler and for long enough in Joseph...."

On April 30, Hitler did something extraordinary. He told Junge, "Since I did not feel that I could accept the responsibility of marriage during the years of struggle, I have decided now, before the end of my earthly career, to take, as my wife, the girl who, after many years of loyal friendship, came of her own free will to this city, already almost besieged, in order to share my fate. At her own request she goes to her death with me as my wife. Death will compensate us for what we were both deprived of by my labors in the service to my people."

Hitler, of course, was referring to his long-suffering mistress Eva Braun, who had existed in the shadows for so long that hardly any German even knew about the plain blonde cipher who preferred fashion catalogs and movie-star magazines to anything more intellectually stimulating. If it seemed to her that it was a cruel joke as the most powerful man in German history was going to make her "an honest woman" on the brink of their mutual deaths, she said nothing about it. She just smiled her wan smile and enjoyed her brief moment in the rapidly dimming spotlight.

Hitler went on: "My wife and I choose to die in order to escape the shame of overthrow or capitulation. It is our wish that our bodies be burned immediately, here



**ABOVE:** German soldiers, probably pressed into service as members of the Volkssturm, build a barricade across a Berlin street under the direction of an officer. Old men and boys fought to the death to defend Hitler and the Nazi capital while the Führer was sequestered in the bunker beneath the city. **BETWEEN:** Left to right, Hitler's bodyguard Rochus Misch, valet Heinz Linge, and chauffeur Erich Kempka were among the last to see the Führer alive. Hitler's lifeless body and that of Eva Braun were carried to the garden of the Reich Chancellery, doused with gasoline, and set on fire.



where I have performed the greater part of my daily work during the 12 years I served my people."

Hitler's biographer John Toland wrote that perhaps Hitler "feared that [marriage] might diminish his uniqueness as Führer; to most Germans he was almost a Christlike figure. But now all that was over and the bourgeois side of his nature impelled him to reward his faithful mistress with the sanctity of matrimony."

On the evening of April 30, the couple—with Hitler in his usual uniform and Eva in a black silk taffeta dress, said their wedding vows in front of a small coterie of eight guests; a minor official had been found to officiate. Throughout the bunker, groups of staffers smiled and celebrated. It was the first time in many weeks there had been anything worth smiling about.

The smiles did not last. The artillery continued to drum overhead. It seemed as if the fighting was drawing ever closer to the bunker. Soon the war, and perhaps all of their lives, would be over.

That evening, while Hitler and Eva were relaxing with the other residents of the bunker, the Führer decided to hand out a strange gift to all assembled: cyanide capsules. Someone wondered if they would be effective; after all, they had been supplied by the traitor Himmler. Dr. Stumpfegger suggested one of the capsules be tested on Hitler's beloved German shepherd Blondi. Strangely, Hitler went along with the idea.

A doctor in the bunker hospital was summoned and ordered to give the poison to the animal; it died within seconds. The group put their capsules into their pockets to be used "when the time was right."

News was then received that Hitler's one-time Italian ally, Benito Mussolini, had been captured by partisans, killed, his body badly abused by his furious countrymen and strung up by the heels in a Milan gas station along with his mistress and a handful of other followers.

Hitler shuddered at the thought that the same thing could happen to him. "I will not fall into the hands of the enemy, dead or alive," he declared. "After I die, my body shall be burned and remain undiscovered forever!"

Adolf Hitler took his own life, and that of his bride Eva, late on April 30. Rochus Misch, a Polish-born SS-Mann who had been a member of Hitler's bodyguard for five years, recalled that Hitler had locked himself in his room with Eva shortly after their wedding.

"Everyone was waiting for the shot," Misch said. "We were expecting it.... Then came the shot. Heinz Linge [Hitler's valet] took me to one side and we went in. I saw Hitler slumped by the table. I didn't see any blood on his head. I saw Eva with her knees drawn up lying next to him on the sofa...."

Hitler's chauffeur, Lt. Col. Erich Kempka, had just returned to the bunker with a detail of men who had braved shot and shell to retrieve 170 liters of gasoline. Dr. Stumpfegger and Linge carried the Führer's body up the stairs and into the garden 10 feet outside the bunker; Martin Bormann followed, carrying Eva Hitler's limp body. She was

placed at her dead husband's right side.

Russian shells were coming closer, and the men hurried with their tasks. Between bursts Kempka grabbed a jerry can and poured some of the fuel on his beloved master. A nearby burst caused him to retreat to a sheltered place. Once there was a lull, Kempka, Linge, and SS Major Otto Günsche, Hitler's personal adjutant, emptied can after can of gas on the corpses.

A rag was found, doused in fuel, lit with a match, and then Kempka, practically in tears, tossed it onto the bodies. With a whoosh, a fireball blossomed over Hitler and Eva. For the next three hours, each time the flames diminished, more gasoline was poured on them to keep the pyre going.

Later, with their bodies reduced to ashes and scorched bones, the remains were swept into a piece of canvas, laid into the bottom of a shell hole, and covered with dirt. There they would remain until Soviet troops, rummaging through the debris of

**German panzergrenadiers lie where they fell in battle next to a disabled half-track of the 5th SS Panzer Division Wiking. The German forces defending Berlin were nearly annihilated during combat in the streets of the capital.**

National Archives



the Chancellery a couple of days later, came across them and took them back to Moscow for identification.

Martin Bormann sent Dönitz a telegram informing him that Hitler was dead and that the admiral, in accordance with the Führer's last wishes, was now president of the Reich.

On the evening of May 1, most of the Hitler entourage was still in the bunker, hearing and feeling the Russian shells bursting above them. The time had come for the final act. Magda Goebbels gathered her six children by Joseph—Helga (12 years old), Hildegard (11), Holdine (eight), Hedwig (seven), Heidrun (four), and son Helmut (nine), and prepared for the end.

She dressed her five daughters in long white nightgowns and then lovingly brushed their hair. Magda told them, "Don't be afraid. The doctor is going to give you a shot now."

Then, at about 8:40 PM, at the direction of Magda, the children were given an injection of morphine by Helmut Kunz, an SS dentist. After the war, Kunz testified, "I injected them with morphine—the eldest daughters first, then the son, then the other daughters. It took around ten minutes.

"When the children were off, Magda Goebbels went into the room, the cyanide capsules in her hand. She was in there for several minutes, then stepped out, crying, saying 'Doctor, I cannot do it. You must.'

"I answered immediately, 'No, I cannot.' Then she cried, 'Well, if you cannot do it, then get Stumpfegger.'"

Dr. Stumpfegger was then summoned. It was he who would carry out the murder of the children. They were not immolated.

Once their children were dead, Magda and Joseph prepared to commit suicide. Goebbels said to Rochus Misch, "Well, Misch, tell Dönitz that we knew how to live. Now we know how to die."

Goebbels then made a little joke, telling those around them that they were going to walk up to the garden to save everyone from having to carry their bodies up the steep steps. He put on his gloves, and then he and Frau Goebbels, who was near collapse, proceeded arm-in-arm up the stairs

to the garden, and to their deaths.

Goebbels made his adjutant, Günther Schwägermann, promise to cremate both his and his wife's bodies. By some accounts they took cyanide and then were administered a coup de grace from Schwägermann's pistol. Their bodies were then doused with

National Archives



ABOVE: A Soviet soldier stands amid debris and wreckage in the Führerbunker after the capitulation of Berlin and the fall of the Third Reich. The Soviets coveted the capture of the Nazi capital and exacted reprisals against the civilian population for German atrocities committed in Russia earlier in the war. BELOW: Escorted by Soviet soldiers during his tour of the Führerbunker, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill exits the complex into bright sunshine.



Imperial War Museum



Colonel General Alfred Jodl, operations officer of Oberkommando der Wehrmacht, signs the instrument of surrender in a schoolhouse at Reims, France, on May 7, 1945. The Soviets were not satisfied with this act and required Jodl's boss, Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, to sign another surrender document.

gasoline and incinerated.

With the Hitlers and the Goebbels now dead, those closest to them at the end chose to make their escape from the doomed city. A few made it—Bormann, Kempka, Schwägermann, Stumpfegger, Günsche, Naumann, Linge, Kunz, Junge, and several others.

When the Russians broke into the Chancellery ruins on May 2, they found Joseph and Magda's burned corpses, took the remains to Magdeburg, and buried them. In 1970, at the direction of KGB director Yuri Andropov, the remains were exhumed, crushed, and dumped into the Biederitz River near Berlin.

With Hitler gone, Nazi Germany's end came swiftly. At 2:30 AM on May 7, Colonel General Alfred Jodl, commander of the Wehrmacht, arrived at SHAEF headquarters in Reims, France, to sign the official Instrument of Surrender; Eisenhower declined to attend. He sent his deputy, Lt. Gen. Walter Bedell Smith, to act in his behalf. Jodl accepted the Allies' demands that all resistance cease by 11:01 PM on May 8. Most of the war-weary Axis soldiers gladly laid down their arms, surprised and grateful to find themselves still alive. A few diehards, however, ignored the order and continued to fight.

A few days after Germany capitulated, Sidney Olson, a *LIFE* magazine correspondent, wrote, "The collapse of the Nazi empire is a fantastic show. Germany is in chaos. It is a country of crushed cities, of pomposities trampled to the ground, of frightened people and also glad people, of horrors beyond imagination ..."

"There are no cities left in Germany. Aachen, Cologne, Bonn, Koblenz, Wurzburg, Frankfurt, Mainz—all gone in one sweeping reach of destruction whose like has not been seen since the mighty Ghengis Khan came from the East and wiped out whole nations all the way from China to Bulgaria...."

"The overall, inescapable fact is that the German people are so solidly, thoroughly indoctrinated with so much of the Nazi ideology that the facts merely bounce off their numbed skulls. It will take years, perhaps generations, to undo the work that Adolf Hitler and his henchmen did."

The taking of Berlin cost the Soviets dearly. From April 16 to May 2, the Red Army

lost more than 361,000 men, including over 81,000 killed or missing. The German defenders lost between 92,000 and 100,000 killed, 220,000 wounded, and nearly a half million men taken prisoner. The battle for Berlin is regarded as the bloodiest battle ever fought.

In 1988, the East German government completed the demolition of the Chancellery site in preparation for the construction of a large apartment complex. Today a small billboard is all that remains to tell visitors of the history of the site.

In his autobiography, Rochus Misch wrote, "Hitler was no brute. He was no monster. He was no superman. I lived with him for five years. We were the closest people who worked with him ... we were always there. Hitler was never without us day and night ... Hitler was a wonderful boss." In a 2003 interview, he added, "It was a good time with Hitler. I enjoyed it, and I was proud to work for him."

History, however, offers a different judgment. Historian Max Domarus has summed up Hitler thus: "Hitler is undoubtedly the most extraordinary figure in German history.... Hitler was power incarnate, a true demon, obsessed with power, the like of whom the world has rarely seen.... Since Napoleon, there had been no tyrant on this scale."

Albert Speer recalled that on May 1, after he had reached Dönitz's headquarters at Plön, he was unpacking his bags and found a framed photo of Hitler that his secretary had included. Speer said, "When I stood the photograph up, a fit of weeping overcame me. That was the end of my relationship to Hitler. Only now was the spell broken, the magic extinguished. What remained were images of graveyards, of shattered cities, of millions of mourners, of concentration camps."

Hitler's unquenchable thirst for power had brought him and Nazi Germany to unimaginable heights, but it also ended in the total destruction of his Third Reich and a cataclysmic reordering of world history.

Still, today—seven decades after his death—Adolf Hitler remains the most extraordinary figure in German history. □

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## Henchmen

*Continued from page 45*

Allied seaborne invasion of Fortress Europe. Raeder was appalled, and as his successor recommended Admiral Rolf Carls, a fellow big fleet devotee.

Convicted at Nuremberg, defendant Raeder was sentenced to life in prison but was released due to ill health in 1955. He published his readable and interesting memoirs in 1960 and died that same year.

### KARL DÖNITZ

The man Hitler chose to wage his new sea war reflected his switch from surface vessels in combat to submarines. Admiral Karl Dönitz, a Great War submariner captured by the Royal Navy in 1918 when his first U-boat command was sunk, had led the U-boat arm of the Kriegsmarine since 1936.

Having joined the Imperial Navy in 1910, young Dönitz, like Keitel, also lost two sons in World War II. Up to his appointment as U-boat commander by Raeder, Dönitz served in a variety of vessels—subs, cruisers, and even torpedo boats.

Near the end of World War I, Dönitz conceived the idea of large groups of submarines concentrated in “wolf packs” to attack British and neutral shipping en masse. Successful for a time, the concept was defeated by superior Allied antisubmarine aerial interception technology, as well as by the convoy system whereby warships protected lightly armed merchant vessels in concentrated groups.

Germany began its second war against the Royal Navy with torpedoes that failed to explode on impact, a known failure as early as 1936 that was not rectified until 1941-1942. For this, both Raeder and Dönitz deserved to be fired for incompetence, negligence, or both, but they were retained. Once the problem was solved, Prime Minister Churchill remarked in his postwar memoirs that only the U-boat menace had truly worried him during 1939-1945.

From 1941 until early 1943, Dönitz was winning his naval war, but by May it was irretrievably lost, with the newly promoted



Admiral Karl Dönitz succeeded Hitler as leader of Germany during the last days of the Third Reich. He served 10 years in prison for war crimes.

grand admiral basically fighting a delaying action for two more years. Late in the war, the number of U-boats reached 600, but new technical devices such as the underwater breathing device called the Schnorkel came too late to reverse the final outcome.

Militarily, Dönitz won points with Hitler for using what he had, rarely asking for more as the Army generals did always. Dönitz also staunchly backed Hitler politically, and the Navy was never considered a traitorous service, as was the Army after the 1944 bomb plot failure.

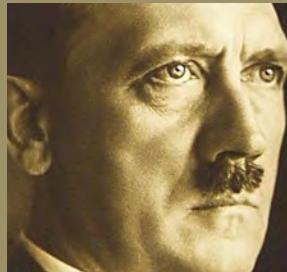
Having demoted Göring as his chosen successor, Hitler surprised almost everyone by naming Dönitz as the next Reich president after his death. Dönitz fired Goebbels, Bormann, and Himmler but kept Speer in his cabinet and had Jodl surrender to the Western Allies and Keitel to the Russians on May 7-8, 1945, respectively.

The Allies ignored the presidency of Dönitz in favor of Göring at Nuremberg, however, and Dönitz was sentenced to 10 years in prison, all of which he served. Like Raeder, Dönitz published his postwar memoirs. He died in 1980 and was buried after an impressive public funeral complete with flags and medals. □



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