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- Pervasive propaganda • The Third Reich at war • Nazis and the occult

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The Nazi era continues to cast the darkest of shadows across modern history. At the centre, of course, stands **Adolf Hitler**. From his ascent as a rabble-rousing agitator in backstreet bierkellers, to autocratic chancellor and finally megalomaniacal despot, what drove his seemingly unstoppable thirst for power?

In this special edition, expert historians investigate not just the *führer's* motivations and methods, but also his **charisma and popularity**. What led thousands to write him letters of devotion, to throng to catch a glimpse of him, and for some to even take part in Nazi breeding programmes to swell his 'master race'? Why, even when the war was clearly lost, did many fight on in his name until the bitter end?

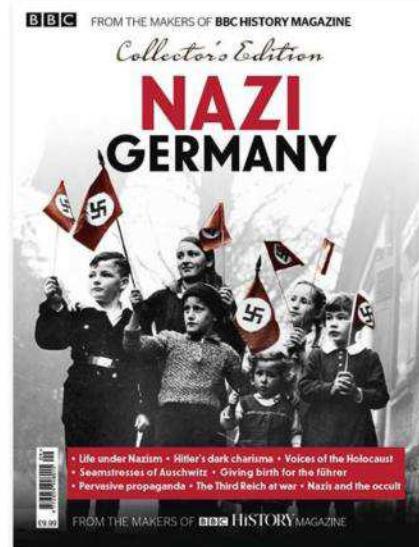
We also explore **life under Nazism**, examining how many ordinary Germans - chastened by defeat in the First World War and hit hard by economic depression - were captivated by Hitler's vision for a vast, new German empire. Through **powerful propaganda** and Nazi holidays to football tournaments and jazz infused with anti-Semitic lyrics, we discover **how the Third Reich gained its hold**.

We also uncover some overlooked aspects of this period of unimaginable injustice and suffering, from the **dressmakers of Auschwitz** forced to make clothes for their captors, to the work of the archivist who recorded the stories of those freed from the **concentration camps**.

Nazi Germany compiles and updates articles that have appeared in *BBC History Magazine* and its sister publication *BBC World Histories*, along with several new features written specially for this edition.

Charlotte Hodgman

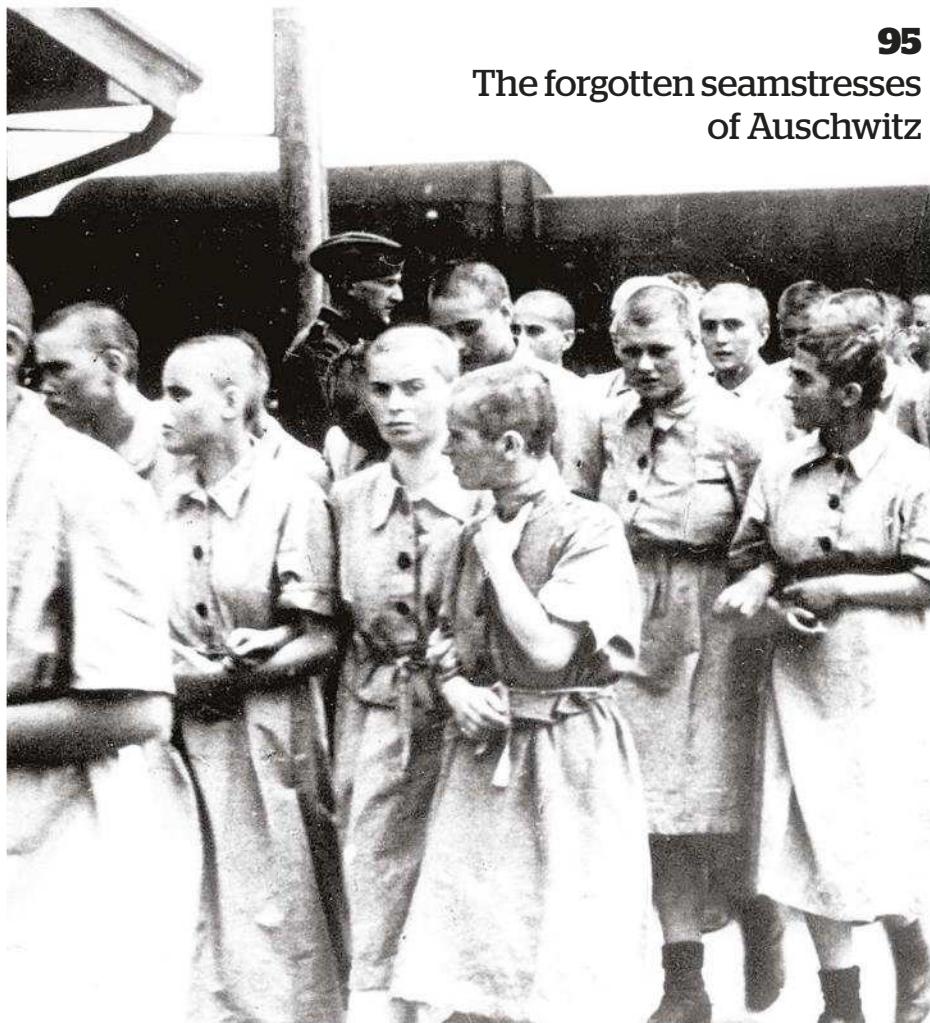
Managing editor



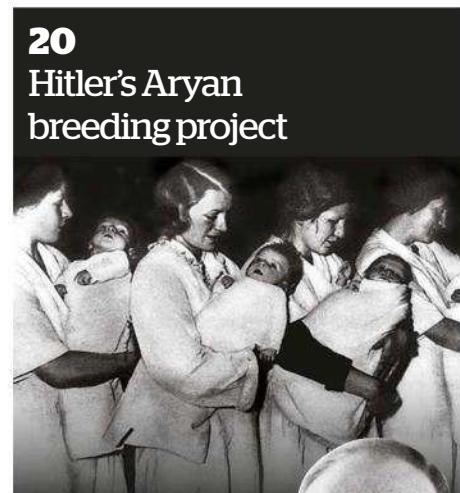
"The vision of such horrific megalomania... still leaves us spellbound at the total, unconstrained power that Hitler embodied."

Acclaimed historian and Hitler biographer **PROFESSOR SIR IAN KERSHAW** discusses the enigma of the *führer*, on page 108

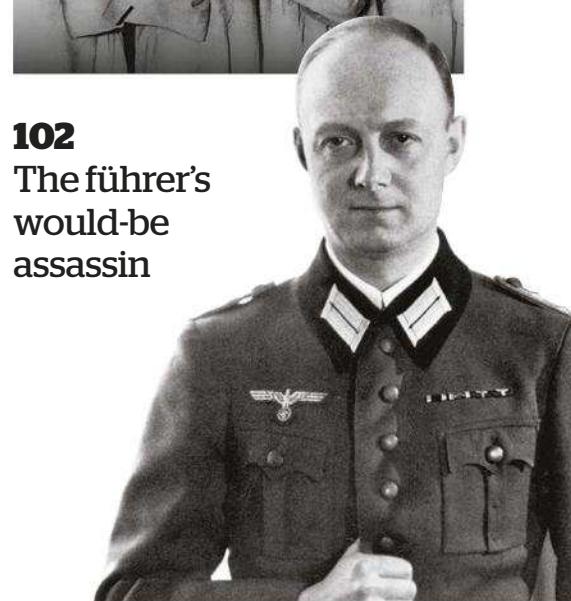
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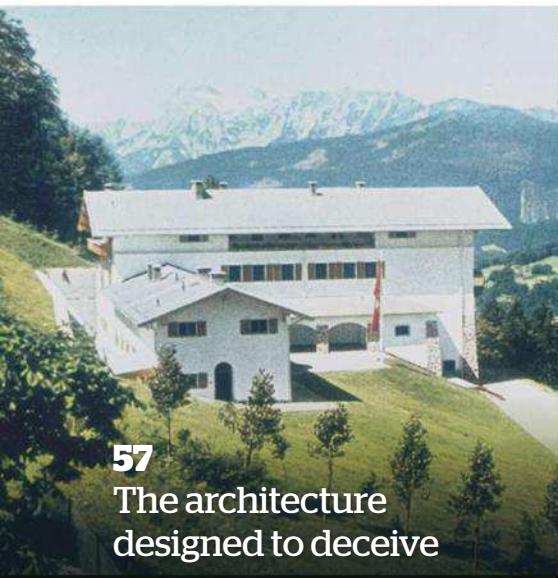
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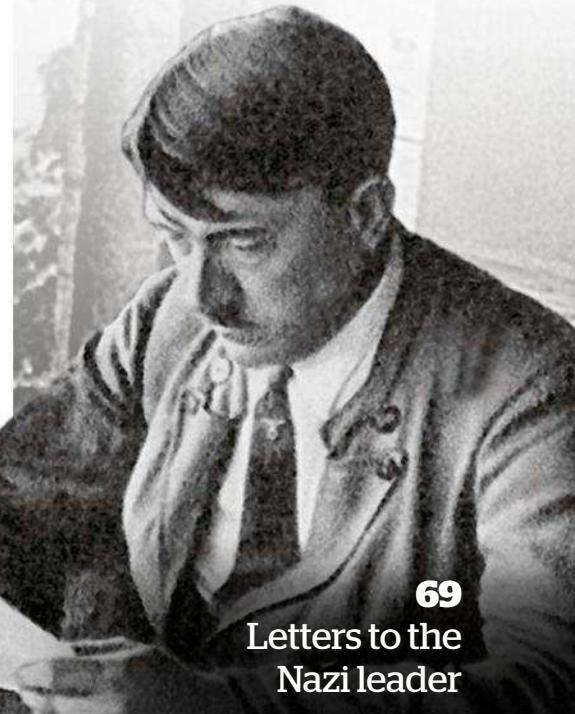
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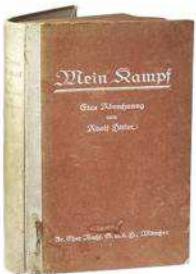
Richard J Evans examines ongoing interest in the Third Reich

The rise and fall of Nazi Germany

Roger Moorhouse traces the key moments, from Hitler's ascent to power to his monstrous empire-building and eventual downfall

1920

On 24 February, Adolf Hitler addresses an audience at Munich's Hofbräuhaus at which he proclaims a manifesto – the 25-Point Programme – for the newly established National Socialist German Workers' party (NSDAP). The 'Nazi party' is born.



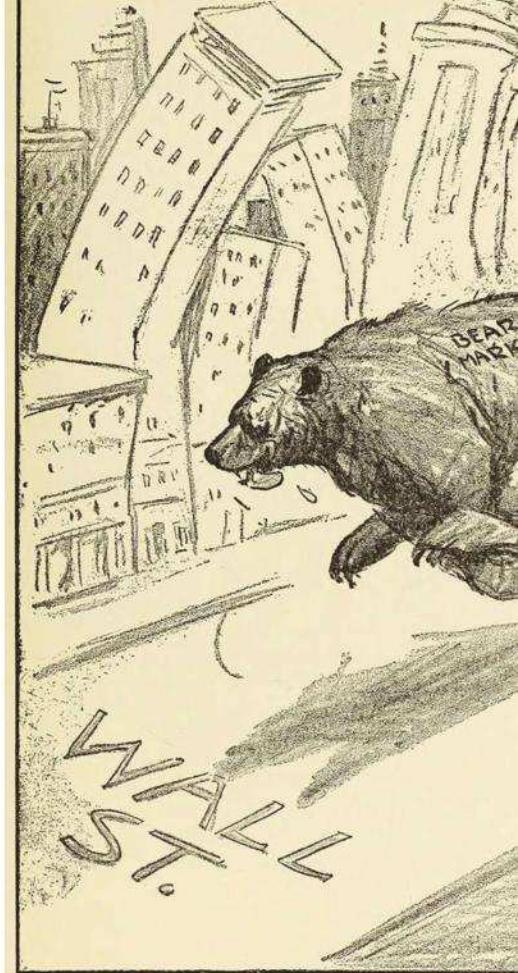
The first edition of *Mein Kampf* sold around 10,000 copies – with 12 million sold by 1945

1924

Convicted of treason following the Munich Putsch, Hitler is sentenced to five years detention in Landsberg Jail, where he serves just under nine months in comfortable conditions, before being released on licence. During his imprisonment, he writes the first volume of his autobiography – cum-manifesto, *Mein Kampf*.

1929

The crash of the US Stock Exchange in October 1929 causes the collapse of the German economy, and in the months and years that follow spurs business closures, wage restrictions and huge unemployment. The political effect of this crisis is a 'flight from the centre', with voters increasingly lured to the extremes, especially the Nazi party.



1920

1925

1930

1923

In November, Hitler takes advantage of the economic and political crisis in Germany and attempts to seize power in Munich. He and his followers are stopped by the guns of the Bavarian police at the Feldherrnhalle. Twenty people are killed, including four policemen.

Nazi stormtroopers during the Munich Putsch, Hitler's failed coup against the Weimar Republic



A Nazi poster attacking Marxism and capitalism, 1932

1932

Germany sees two national elections in 1932 – in July and November – as the political crisis deepens. The Nazis make huge gains in July, doubling their share of the vote, and despite falling back slightly in November, end the year as the largest party in the Reichstag.

January 1933

Attempting to end the political crisis and parliamentary stalemate, senior conservative politicians conspire to bring Hitler into government as chancellor of a coalition administration, in the expectation that they will be able to control him. Hitler, however, is not minded to be controlled.



HOLT

A prescient cartoon predicts the collapse of the US stock market, 1929



Marching into the Rhineland, an area removed from German control by the Versailles Treaty

March 1933

Exploiting the ongoing crisis, Hitler presents an '**Enabling Act**', by which he is permitted, for a four-year period, **to govern without the assent of parliament**. The act is passed by a parliament shorn of many of its left-wing members and intimidated by ranks of Nazi stormtroopers. **It is the cornerstone of Hitler's dictatorship.**

1934

Seeking to reassure the army and eliminate those who might resist him from within the Nazi movement, **Hitler orders a bloody purge of the SA brownshirts**. Among the 100 or so victims executed by the SS are politicians and generals, as well as some of Hitler's former colleagues and allies.

1936

Hitler decides to test the resolve of the western powers by **sending German troops back into the Rhineland**, in direct contravention of the Treaty of Versailles and the Locarno Treaties. Despite the provocation, **the British and French do not respond**.

1935

In creating their racial state, **the Nazis pass a raft of anti-Semitic laws** which serve to further isolate and marginalise Germany's Jewish population, denying Jews citizenship rights, defining Jewishness and outlawing marriage and sexual relations between Jews and non-Jews.

April 1933

Secured in power, it doesn't take long for the Nazis to show their true colours. **A nationwide boycott of Jewish businesses is proclaimed for 1 April**, which is policed by stormtroopers, who intimidate all those who might defy it.



February 1933

After an arson attack on the **German parliament building** in Berlin, a Dutch communist, Marinus van der Lubbe, is arrested. **Hitler interprets the event as a prelude to a Communist uprising** and launches a pre-emptive clampdown on Germany's political left, restricting civil rights and consigning many to the newly-established concentration camps.

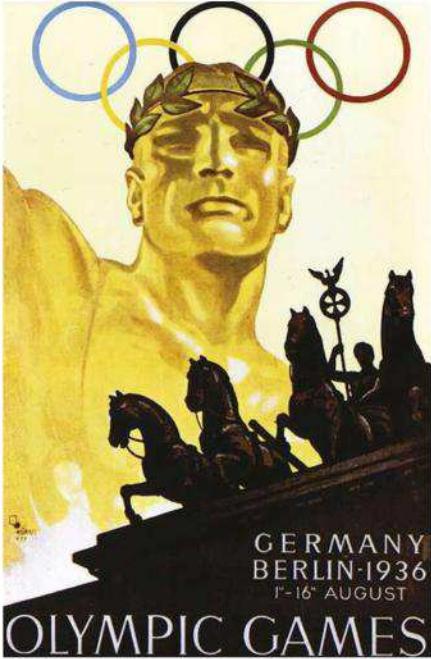
Dutch communist Marinus van der Lubbe

GETTY IMAGES



The anti-Semitic Nuremberg laws "for the protection of German blood and German honour"

Timeline



August 1936

The Berlin Summer Olympics in August 1936 give the Nazi regime a golden opportunity to promote itself and its racial ideals to the wider world. Germany emerges as the most successful country, but the **four gold medals of black American Jesse Owen** contradict Hitler's idea of Aryan racial supremacy.

The 'Nazi Olympics' were a propaganda coup for Hitler, despite the triumph of some African-American athletes

September 1938

Hitler's weaponisation of the grievances of the German minority in Czechoslovakia **leads to a new international crisis**, resulting in Anglo-French agreement to the dismemberment of that country, with Hitler **proclaiming it his "last territorial demand"**. It is the high-watermark of the policy of appeasement.

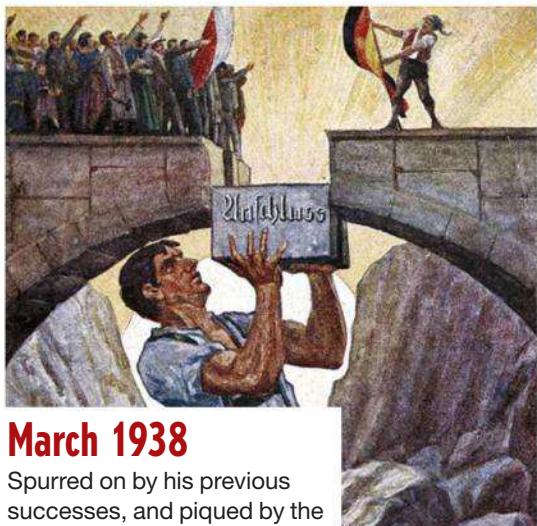
August 1939

Stymied by Polish intransigence and new-found western determination, **Hitler is forced to enlist Soviet help to isolate his next target**, offering Stalin a free hand in eastern Europe in return. The resulting 'Non-Aggression Pact' paves the way for the invasion of Poland, and the **outbreak of the Second World War**.

All smiles (for now) at the signing of the German-Soviet non-aggression pact



1940



March 1938

Spurred on by his previous successes, and piqued by the resistance of Austrian politicians, **Hitler orders his troops into Austria, again in explicit contravention of the Treaty of Versailles**. With popular support for the move confirmed by plebiscite in April, Austria is incorporated into the Reich and 'Greater Germany' is created.

A postcard glorifying the unification of Austria with Germany

March 1939

Emboldened by what he sees as western weakness, **Hitler occupies the remainder of the Czech lands** in March 1939, pushing Slovakia into independence. As his first annexation of non-German territory, Hitler finally provokes a robust response: **Britain and France issue a guarantee to assist Poland** in the event of German aggression.

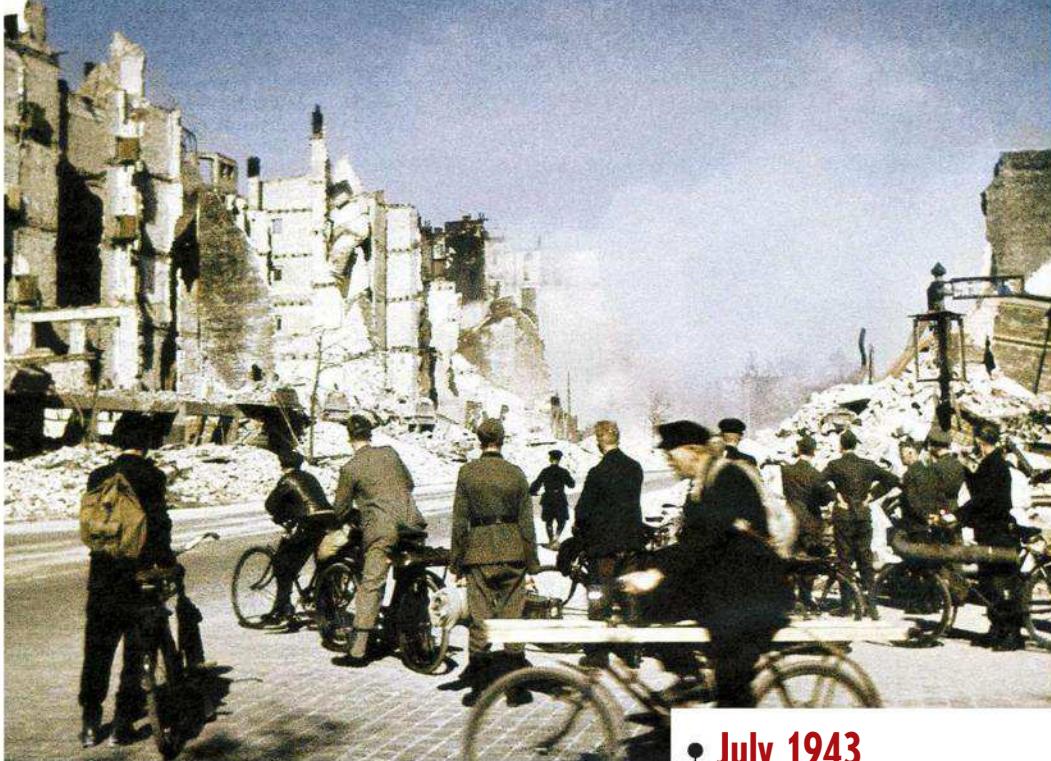
1941

After almost two years of uneasy collaboration with Stalin, **Hitler turns on his erstwhile ally and invades the USSR** in June 1941, unleashing a brutal conflict that consumes countless lives. Employing Blitzkrieg tactics, **Hitler anticipates that Soviet resistance will swiftly collapse**. He is to be disappointed.

Germany invades the USSR. The losses would be staggering



GETTY IMAGES



Hamburg in ruins after devastating Allied bombardment, July 1943

February 1943

In the winter of 1942–3, the pivotal battle for **Stalingrad** marks the highpoint of the German advance eastwards. Defeat, and the loss of the 6th Army, **severely dents Germany's offensive capabilities**, not least as the strategic initiative effectively passes to Stalin's Red Army.

July 1943

The Anglo-American bombing of **Hamburg** in the last week of July 1943 demonstrates the deadly superiority that Allied air forces will soon enjoy in the air. Tens of thousands are killed on the ground, and swathes of the city are destroyed. **German morale is severely dented**.

1944

The failed plot to kill Hitler at his headquarters, masterminded by Col. Claus von Stauffenberg, marks the most serious attempt on Hitler's life. It also includes an attempted coup in Berlin, which is crushed. Almost all of those implicated are arrested, tried and executed.

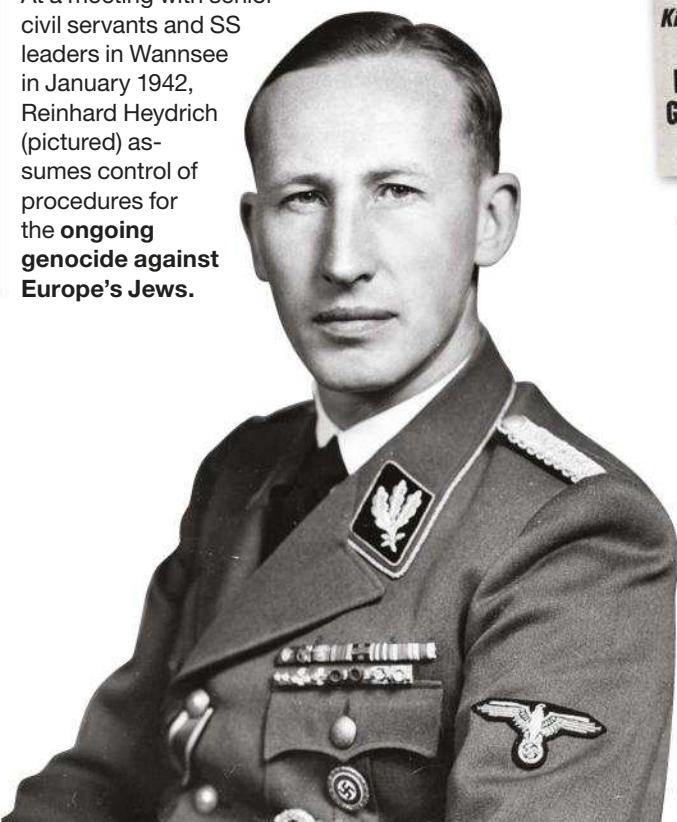
1945

1942

With the expansion of the war in 1941, the Nazis decide on a **murderous 'final solution' to the 'Jewish question'**.

At a meeting with senior civil servants and SS leaders in Wannsee in January 1942, Reinhard Heydrich (pictured) assumes control of procedures for the **ongoing genocide against Europe's Jews**.

ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES



July 1943

Enduring an Allied invasion, **Mussolini's Italy seeks a way out of the war and the Duce is deposed** following a vote of no confidence by the Fascist Grand Council in late July. Italy signs an armistice with the Allies six weeks later, leaving German forces to hold the line.

1945

With the German capital about to fall to the Soviets, **Hitler decides to end his life rather than be taken captive**. After marrying his long-term partner Eva Braun, he commits suicide in his Berlin bunker, and his body is burnt. **His 'Third Reich' outlives him by only a week.** ■

Roger Moorhouse is an author of several books, including *Berlin at War* (Bodley Head, 2010)

DAILY

Living under Nazism

The impact of Nazi rule on the German people

Holidays with Hitler

Cheap vacations in exchange for National Socialism

The women who gave birth for Hitler

The Nazi mission to create a pure master race

Hitler's people

What drove the German population to embrace the Third Reich?

The Nazi serial killer

Berlin rail worker Paul Orgorzow's bloody killing spree

Hitler's jazz band

Using 'degenerate' music as pro-Nazi propaganda

The Nazi final

The dramatic 1941 German football match

LIFE



Living under Nazism

Hitler's murderous regime would govern Germany for over 12 years, using propaganda and oppression to further his totalitarian goals. **Konrad H Jarausch** explores how Nazi rule affected the German people

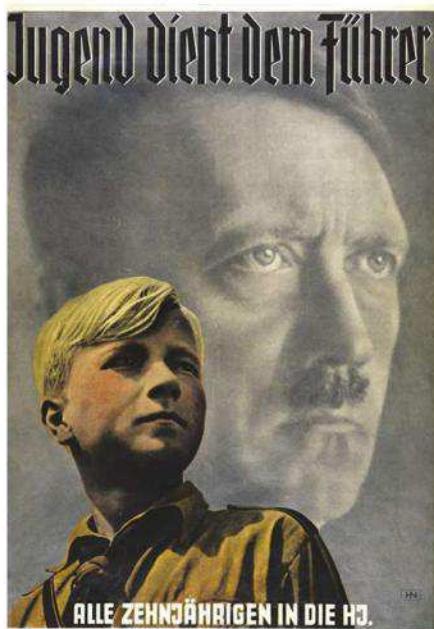
Life in the Third Reich provoked a broad range of emotions. Initially, to both early party members and recent converts, the Nazis offered excitement: parades, Hitler's harangues and Goebbels' propaganda. More moderate citizens were less sure about promises of national renewal, and just hoped to get on with their lives. But members of the political left and Jews lived in ever-increasing fear of violence and incarceration.

The Nazi government claimed that it would solve the multiple crises that beset the German state after the First World War. The harsh terms of the Treaty of Versailles and runaway inflation made it difficult for democracy to take root, in spite of the Weimar Republic's progressive constitution and extensive welfare measures. When the Great Depression threw about one-third of German employees out of work, the populace turned to this new radical movement that promised to restore prosperity and international respect, led by a self-styled 'führer' who promised to make Germany great again. Ever more disgruntled citizens voted for him or donned the brown uniforms of the National Socialist German Workers' Party – the Nazis.

Much of the attraction of the Nazi movement derived from its promise to overcome political and social cleavages by restoring national unity. This *Volksgemeinschaft* ('people's community') would embrace all Germans of Aryan

descent, regardless of class or religion, in one happy family. Many nationalists despised partisan conflicts and longed for the sense of unity they had felt in the First World War trenches. As long as the Nazi demands upon their time were none too onerous, apolitical citizens simply continued with their everyday lives.

But such inclusion also required the



"Youth serves the führer:
all 10-year-olds in the *Hitlerjugend*"
– a propaganda poster from c1936
idealises a blond 'Aryan' Hitler Youth

exclusion of purported enemies. A first target of persecution was the political left, comprising liberals, social democrats and communists – the Nazis' chief competitors. Even more hated were the Jews, whom the Nazis accused of destroying culture through modernist decadence. Further victims were homosexuals, 'gypsies' (Roma) and those with physical or learning disabilities, charged with eroding the Aryan race.

The Nazi government appealed especially to the young, praising them as torch-bearers for Germany's future. The *Hitlerjugend* (HJ; Hitler Youth) and its female counterpart the *Bund Deutscher Mädel* (BDM; League of German Girls) offered teenagers the chance to enjoy exciting leisure activities such as hiking, camping or flying gliders. Many children born during the 1920s flocked to these organisations, which offered them independence according to the Youth Movement motto: "youth led by youth". For instance, Rolf Bulwin, who felt proud at looking snappy in his "tight uniform", was a dedicated HJ leader who enjoyed playing outdoor games, preparing boys for future war. Similarly, Eva Peters was delighted to be appointed as a BDM leader: she felt called upon "to dedicate life to the service of a great and overpowering idea, called Germany". There were of course also some moderate sceptics, but the great majority of the young bought into the Nazi project – though since all youth organisations were brought under the control of the party, many had little choice anyway.

Propaganda triumphs

Following the führer during peacetime was relatively easy, because Hitler convinced even his critics through his surprising political successes. Within a year of the Nazis seizing power, unemployment fell drastically thanks to public works projects and clandestine rearmament. Spectacular events such as the Nuremberg rallies made members feel they belonged to an unstoppable movement of national regeneration.

Young girls salute Nazi paramilitaries. Such parades offered ordinary Germans excitement and a sense of pride during drab depression years

AKG IMAGES



Even international observers were impressed by the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin, at which the German team won the largest number of medals. And then there were such foreign-policy triumphs as the return of the Saar Basin to Germany in 1935, the largely voluntary Anschluss (annexation) of Austria in 1938 and the coerced dismemberment of Czechoslovakia. Many young people were impressed by Hitler's charisma, as BDM enthusiast Renate Finckh expressed: "Since the *führer* is here, we are somebody again!"

But not all Germans were swept away by Nazi propaganda. Among the workers, many communists and social democrats clung to Marxist convictions, only to be hounded by the Gestapo, beaten and incarcerated. Germans who were now racially defined as Jews, such as Tom Angress, faced boycott and dismissal from 1933, lost their citizenship in 1935 with the Nuremberg Laws, and had their stores destroyed and synagogues burned in 1938 in order to force them to emigrate. Tom put his sorrow over the rejection into poetic lines: "We know no more justice, only repression/Our homeland doesn't love us anymore." And people with disabilities who lived in institutions were silently murdered by doctors in the name of eugenics.

The Second World War transformed life

under the Nazi dictatorship by turning its murderous force onto its own supporters and accomplices. At the beginning of the war, patriotic youths such as Ursula Mahlendorf experienced "a continuous sense of exhilaration", but during the second half of the struggle many began to realise that they would have to pay a terrible price for following the *führer*'s dreams. More and more young men were killed in action, annihilating much of the entire age cohort, while female supporters of the war suffered Allied saturation bombing, expulsion from the east, and rape by advancing Soviet soldiers.

For the political and racial victims, the war meant mass murder in political prisons, concentration camps and extermination

sites in an unspeakable Holocaust. All too few survived the death camps. One who experienced liberation was the writer Ruth Krüger, who recalled how "one day they came, the 'Amis', the Americans... The long nightmare [was] suddenly over."

The shattering defeat of the Wehrmacht, the destruction of cities, the imprisonment of soldiers, women's struggle to survive – in short, endless suffering – finally led most Germans to distance themselves from National Socialism. When the journalist Lore Walb reread her wartime diary decades later, through "the confrontation with [her] collaboration" she was struck with the painful realisation that she had served an evil cause.

Though not all showed such remorse, most survivors of the Weimar cohort gradually disassociated themselves from their nationalist beliefs. It was their terrible experience in the Third Reich that turned postwar Germans into chastened democrats, committed to peace, social solidarity and human rights. ■

As the war went on, many began to realise they would pay a terrible price for following the *führer*'s dreams

Konrad H Jarausch is Lurcy Professor of European Civilization at the University of North Carolina, and author of *Broken Lives: How Ordinary Germans Experienced the 20th Century* (Princeton University Press, 2018)

Holidays with Hitler

The Nazis seduced as well as terrorised the German people into buying into National Socialism, says **Roger Moorhouse**. And one way they did it was by offering workers cheap holidays in the sun

All in it together
On board the *Wilhelm Gustloff*, c1939, members of the Nazis' vast KdF programme of subsidised leisure activities designed to promote a new 'national community'



If the name of the Nazi cruise liner *Wilhelm Gustloff* registers a flicker of recognition with readers, it will most probably be because of the grim circumstances of the vessel's demise during the Second World War.

Torpedoed by a Soviet submarine on 30 January 1945, the ship sank into the icy waters of the eastern Baltic within an hour. Of the estimated 10,000 German refugees and wounded crammed aboard, barely 1,200 would survive the night.

It is in this guise then, as modern history's deadliest maritime disaster, that the story of the *Wilhelm Gustloff* – if it is known at all – is remembered. Alongside a few history books, the drama of her sinking has spawned a film and a couple of German TV dramas. It also featured prominently in one of Günter Grass's later novels, *Crabwalk* (2002). Yet, there is much else in the story of the *Wilhelm Gustloff* that is of interest, not least its origins as the Third Reich's most famous cruise liner.

Launched in May 1937, from the slipway at Blohm and Voss in Hamburg, the *Wilhelm Gustloff* (named after the founder of the Swiss Nazi party, who was assassinated in 1936) was state of the art. Weighing in at more than 25,000 tonnes and measuring more than 200 metres from bow to stern, she was larger and considerably heavier than Hitler's so-called 'pocket battleships', the *Deutschland*, the *Admiral Scheer* and the *Graf Spee*.

In line with the 'national socialist' ethos of the regime, the *Gustloff* was described as a 'classless' ship. Her 616 cabins – spread over four decks and able to accommodate more than 1,400 passengers – were all constructed to two basic patterns, two or four-berth, and all had a sea view, with toilet facilities shared. In addition, her seven bars, two restaurants, two dance halls, concert hall, library, hairdressing salon and swimming pool were all accessible to all passengers. As the Nazi minister Robert Ley

boasted at her launch: "We Germans do not use any old crate for our working men and women. Only the best is good enough."

So what was Nazi Germany doing building cruise ships for its working men and women? Our usual assumption about the Third Reich is that it functioned primarily on fear: fear of the Gestapo, fear of the concentration camps, fear of stepping out of line. While this is not entirely inaccurate, it does rather obscure the fact that Nazi Germany was as much a state built on seduction as on threats.

An essential part of that seduction was provided by the Nazi leisure organisation that had commissioned the *Wilhelm Gustloff* – the improbably named Kraft durch Freude, or Strength Through Joy, usually shortened to KdF. Established in 1933 as a subdivision of the German Labour Front, the KdF had a simple premise: state-organised leisure. Just as Nazism sought to woo the ordinary German worker away from socialism towards 'National Socialism', so the KdF promised holidays, cultural enrichment and sporting activities as part of the appeal. In essence, it was offering cruises and concerts in place of collective bargaining and class struggle.

Wooing the working class

It was not an entirely cynical exercise. Indeed, it was an expression of the socialist impulse that had been part of the Nazi ethos since the party's foundation, and which, though diluted in the years that followed, had never been extinguished entirely. It came to be expressed via the concept of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, the idea that all Germans were members of a 'national community' that transcended class or regional divides. As KdF officials proclaimed in 1933, the organisation was to serve as a "cultural tutor", teaching all Germans – whether Bavarians or Frisians, East Prussians or Württembergers – to become part of the nation, to "feel the pulse of their own blood".

The KdF and the *Volksgemeinschaft* were not afterthoughts or simply eyewash to seduce the gullible; they were an integral part of Nazi Germany's vision for its new society. Every German worker was encouraged to become a member, and by 1939 around 25 million of them had signed up. Each paid a 50-pfennig monthly subscription, which entitled them to apply for tickets to subsidised sporting and cultural events, such as theatre showings, concerts, chess tournaments, weekend rambles or swimming lessons. It was no sideshow. In 1937, the year the *Wilhelm Gustloff* was launched, the KdF staged more than 600,000 cultural

"Marxism only talks about it, but National Socialism delivers the worker's dearest wish: a carefree holiday in which to laze to your heart's content"

and sporting events across Germany, which were attended by nearly 50 million participants. By 1939, the last year in which the organisation was fully operative, those figures had almost doubled.

Aside from weekend and evening activities, the KdF also expanded into providing holidays for German workers. It had been one of its key commitments to provide an annual holiday for every German worker, and it was seriously meant: holiday provision quickly accounted for a fifth of the organisation's total expenditure. In one of the first of such excursions, 1,000 Berlin workers were sent on a chartered train to Bavaria in February 1934.

In the five years to 1939, the KdF organised around 7 million holidays, potentially encompassing one in 10 of the German population. Such trips, predominantly within Germany itself, were for the first time made affordable for ordinary working-class Germans, many of whom had never been 'on holiday' before. They could be paid for piecemeal by purchasing stamps in a savings book and were heavily subsidised.

It was in this spirit that the vast resort complex at Prora on the Baltic island of Rügen was conceived – as a place where all Germans would mix and mingle and enjoy the bracing sea air – and all for the bargain price of 18 Reichsmarks (RM, the currency in Germany from 1924–48) per week.

Though the outbreak of war meant it would never receive any holidaymakers, Prora's huge 3 mile building was constructed to house 20,000 at a time and was to serve as a showpiece of the 'New Germany'. It was planned to be one of four such resorts.

The same logic applied to the construction of the KdF fleet, including the *Wilhelm Gustloff*: that of providing the ordinary German worker with the possibility of enjoying a sea cruise, something that had previously only been available to the very wealthy. In 1937, the year that the *Gustloff* was being fitted out and was yet to enter service, the KdF fleet of nine vessels made 146 cruises, carrying more than 130,000 passengers to destinations from the Baltic Sea to Madeira.

Costs, subsidised of course, were afford-

able, with 59 RM charged for a five-day tour of the Norwegian fjords and 63 RM for a week in the Mediterranean, rising to 150 RM for a 12-day tour around Italy and 155 RM for a two-week voyage to Lisbon and Madeira. With average weekly wages at around 30 RM per week, it is easy to see the enormous popular appeal that such trips had.

Naturally, there was a catch. Indoctrination and propaganda were never far from the surface on a KdF cruise. The tour leader doubled as a Nazi propagandist, imparting political messages with the daily briefing. Destinations, too, were carefully chosen, including either 'friendly' countries, such as Spain or Italy, or those such as Libya and Morocco that wouldn't dent Germany's sense of Aryan superiority. Even the ship's tannoy would be harnessed to broadcast patriotic music or speeches by party grandees. For those people who resisted such blandishments, each cruise carried aboard it a small team of plain clothes Gestapo men to report on any 'misdemeanours'.

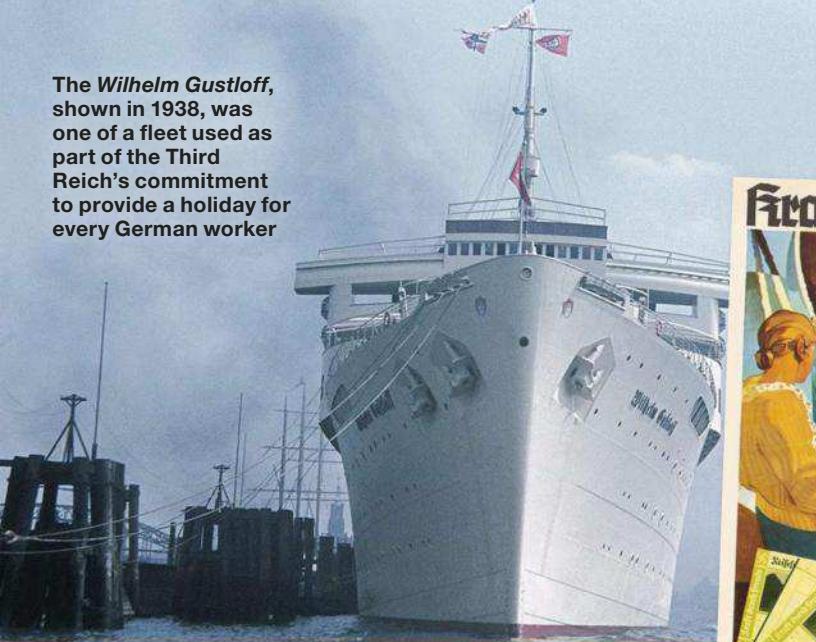
They needn't have worried. Aside from perennial concerns about the 'gentrification' of what were supposed to be cruises for German workers – the prevalence of the middle and upper classes among the *Gustloff*'s passengers – the KdF fleet was a huge success. Demand swiftly outstripped supply, and a sister ship to the *Gustloff*, the *Robert Ley*, entered service in 1939 shortly before the clouds of war gathered again over Europe.

In late August of that year, the *Wilhelm Gustloff* was briefly intercepted by a Royal Navy destroyer on her return from the Norwegian fjords, a sign of the heightened tensions. A few days later, she was redesignated as a hospital ship and confined to port. Her cruising days were over. According to the KdF's own statistics, more than 75,000 passengers had sailed on her, one in 10 of the organisation's total. One might surmise that the German people had been suitably seduced.

Vacation indoctrination

Of course, the logic behind the KdF's activities – whether on land, or on the high seas – was never altruistic. It was brutally political. Aside from embodying the totalitarian desire to infiltrate and control every aspect of the individual's life, the KdF's offerings were also a crude bid for the workers' allegiance, an attempt to undermine their traditional loyalty to socialism. A propaganda picture from 1938 summed up the approach. Beneath an image of flat-capped workers relaxing in the sunshine on the deck of the *Gustloff*, the caption read: "Marxism only talks about it, but National

The *Wilhelm Gustloff*, shown in 1938, was one of a fleet used as part of the Third Reich's commitment to provide a holiday for every German worker



ABOVE: A dining hall on *Wilhelm Gustloff* during its maiden voyage. Facilities also included seven bars, two dance halls, a concert hall, library and hairdressers



ABOVE: "Kraft durch Freude" (KdF, or Strength Through Joy) reads this c1938 propaganda poster advertising Hitler's holiday scheme

BELOW: The indoor swimming pool on *Gustloff's* sister ship, the KdF vessel *Robert Ley*, pictured in 1939



Holidaymakers at Berlin's Tempelhof airport heading off to Upper Bavaria on a KdF skiing holiday in c1935



Socialism delivers the worker's dearest wish: a carefree annual holiday in which to laze to your heart's content."

Beyond this, there was also an important economic rationale – that of maximising production by fostering a contented and, above all, motivated workforce. "We do not send our workers to holiday on cruise ships, or build them enormous seaside resorts just for the sake of it," one KdF report explained. "We do it only to maintain and strengthen the labour potential of the individual, and to allow him to return to his workplace with renewed focus."

Hitler's attitude towards the KdF was more cynical still. As he made clear to one of his ministers in 1934, an important motive behind the programme was to ensure German workers were tempered, militarised, ready for any eventuality – even war. "Make sure for me," he said, "that the people hold their nerve, for only with a people with strong nerves can we pursue politics." 'Pursuing politics' was one of Hitler's favourite euphemisms.

The *Wilhelm Gustloff* was never just another cruise liner; she was always a symbol. Most obviously perhaps, her sinking in 1945 – on the very day that Hitler had risen to power, 12 years earlier – was highly symbolic, a microcosm of the bloody demise that would soon engulf Germany. Despite being the deadliest maritime disaster in modern history, her 9,000-odd dead hardly registered in the slaughter of the final months of the Second World War.

Yet, there is another, rather more profound, symbolism at play. With our focus fixed on the overarching narrative of Nazi persecution and genocide, we forget that, for a generation of Germans, the *Wilhelm Gustloff* was a symbol of the bright shining future that the Third Reich appeared to be offering them – a world of opportunity, community and modernity. She was an essential part of Nazism's seductive appeal and a vital reminder to later generations that Nazi Germany did not live on threats alone. ■

Roger Moorhouse is the author of several books on modern German history, including *Berlin at War* (Bodley Head, 2010)

DISCOVER MORE

BOOK

► **Ship of Fate: The Story of the MV *Wilhelm Gustloff*** by Roger Moorhouse (Endeavour Press, 2016, e-book available via Amazon)

The next generation

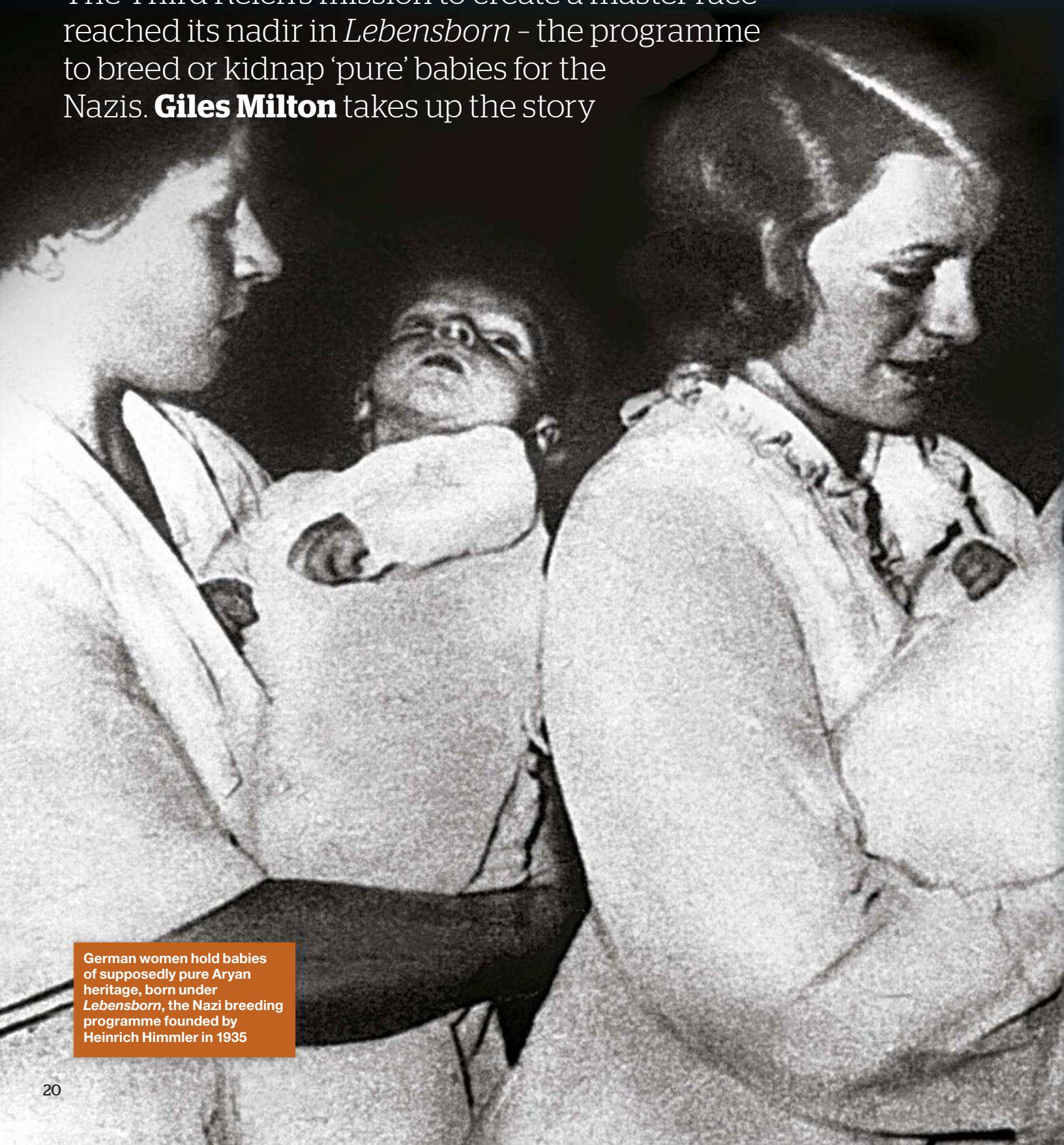
Members of the Bund Deutscher Mädel (League of German Girls) perform in a gymnastics display in 1938. Founded in 1930 as the female sector of the Hitler Youth, the league focused on creating good Nazi women who would be dutiful housewives and mothers. Sports such as gymnastics and athletics were designed to instil discipline and competitiveness, as well as create healthy young women who would be fit for childbirth.





THE WOMEN WHO GAVE

The Third Reich's mission to create a master race reached its nadir in *Lebensborn* - the programme to breed or kidnap 'pure' babies for the Nazis. **Giles Milton** takes up the story



German women hold babies of supposedly pure Aryan heritage, born under *Lebensborn*, the Nazi breeding programme founded by Heinrich Himmler in 1935

BIRTH FOR HITLER



GETTY IMAGES

Shortly after the outbreak of war, young Hannelore Schottgen felt a flurry of excitement when she learned there was to be a special visitor to her school. A woman from the Woman's Union was coming to talk to her class and it promised to be a welcome interlude from the day's timetable.

The only thing that puzzled Hannelore was the subject matter. The woman was coming to talk about *Lebensborn*, something she had never heard of before. Schottgen lived in Pforzheim, southern Germany – a provincial town whose inhabitants were conservative in outlook and rigid in their morals. The townspeople had turned out in force when Hitler visited in 1933 and young Hannelore, like so many of her friends, had been quick to join the *Bund Deutscher Mädel* (League of German Girls, the female branch of the Hitler Youth).

In spite of their enthusiasm for the new Germany, she and her classmates were deeply shocked when they heard what the Woman's Union representative had to say. Her talk was indeed about *Lebensborn* or 'Fountain of Life' – an SS-run association founded in 1935 by Heinrich Himmler, the Reichsführer of the SS. Its purpose was to breed 'racially pure' children.

Perfecting the race

The idea was to couple Aryan men and women in the hope that they would produce blue-eyed, blond-haired babies. They were to be raised from birth in special indoctrination schools. If all went to plan, they would become fanatically loyal supporters of the Nazi regime. They could even become the first generation of a future master race.

The girls listened in horrified astonishment to the woman's speech. She told them that if they volunteered to get pregnant and "give a child for the *führer*", they would be offered untold extravagances, as well as free lodging in a luxury chateau.

Her talk prompted a vigorous debate among Hannelore and her classmates. Some thought it immoral to have a child that would be separated at birth from its parents. Others argued that the war demanded sacrifices. All were deeply confused. For years they had been brought up to be clean-living girls belonging to the League of German Girls: propaganda posters showed virtuous German mothers (with blond plaits) surrounded by happy children. Now, they were being told to give birth outside wedlock. Eventually one of Hannelore's friends spoke for the majority. "At the end of the day," she said, "we've got to keep our human dignity."

Hannelore Schottgen agreed. Indeed she



The 'racial value' of a Polish girl is assessed, 1943. Thousands of foreign children were kidnapped under *Lebensborn*

The idea was to couple Aryan men and women in the hope they would produce blue-eyed, blond-haired babies

found it hard to believe that anyone would sign up for such a twisted programme. Yet many would-be mothers did indeed join *Lebensborn* within months of the first birthing home opening in 1936.

Situated in the village of Steinhoering, near Munich, the Heim Hochland institution was to become the model for many others: 12 in Germany and Austria, nine in Norway, along with a handful in Belgium, Holland, France, Luxembourg and Denmark. These homes provided a secure environment for women to get pregnant with selected SS officers, as well as offering aid to unmarried women who had accidentally fallen pregnant. This aid was always on the proviso that both partners were classified as 'racially valuable'.

Lebensborn was so secretive that few women would ever confess to having been involved. But one young German mother, Hildegard Trutz, agreed to be interviewed in the immediate aftermath of the war. Her story sheds fascinating light on the institution.

Young Hildegard Trutz had been a loyal supporter of the Nazis ever since Hitler came to power. Like Hannelore Schottgen, she loved the weekly meetings of the League of German Girls. "I was mad about Adolf Hitler and our new better Germany," she said.

Trutz quickly became a figurehead of her

local organisation, in part because of her Germanic blond hair and blue eyes. "I was the perfect example of the Nordic woman," she said, "for, besides my long legs and my long trunk, I had the broad hips and pelvis built for child-bearing."

She was unsure what to do when she finished school in 1936 and chatted with a leader from the League. "If you don't know what to do," she was told, "why not give the *führer* a child? What Germany needs more than anything is racially valuable stock."

The woman explained to Trutz that she would be given medical tests, along with an investigation of her background. It was essential that she had no Jewish blood. Once given the all clear, she would select a breeding partner from a group of SS officers.

Trutz listened with growing enthusiasm. "It sounded wonderful," she said, and signed up immediately. Aware that her parents would disapprove, she told them that she was undertaking a residential course in National Socialism.

Selecting 'pure' partners

She was escorted to a castle in Bavaria, where 40 other girls were living under assumed names. "All you needed was a certificate of Aryan ancestry as far back as your great-grandparents."

The castle itself was the height of luxury, with sports facilities, a music room and a cinema. "The whole place was in the charge of a professor, a high-up SS doctor, who examined each of us very thoroughly as soon as we arrived. We had to make a statutory declaration that there had never been any cases of hereditary diseases, dipsomania or imbecility in our family."

The professor also made the girls sign a document renouncing all claims to their newborn babies. They would be brought up in special institutions that would instil an absolute loyalty to the Nazi ideal.

After their initiation, Trutz and the other girls were introduced to the SS officers. "They were all very tall and strong, with blue eyes and blond hair," recalled Trutz. There was a getting-to-know-you session, and games and social evenings in the castle.

"We were given about a week to pick the man we liked and we were told to see to it that his hair and eyes corresponded exactly to ours," said Trutz. The girls were not told the names of any of the men: anonymity was a key part of *Lebensborn*.

"When we had made our choice, we had to wait until the tenth day after the beginning of our last period." Each girl was given a final medical examination before being told to sleep with her chosen SS officer that night. Trutz was excited by both the sexual activity

Children taken or bred
for the 'master race'
undergo skin lightening
treatment to look more
Aryan, 1941



A c1938 poster for
the League of
German Girls,
one organisation
which promoted
the breeding
scheme to young
German girls



Babies
born at a
Lebensborn
house

Daily life / Birthing for Hitler

The trial of Inge Viermetz, one of those responsible for abducting children for Germanisation under the *Lebensborn* programme



and the fact that she was doing it for the *führer*. Both her and her partner “believed completely in the importance of what we were doing”.

The officer slept with Trutz for three evenings in that first week. On the other evenings, he slept with other girls in the castle.

Trutz fell pregnant almost immediately and was well cared for during her pregnancy. But the birth itself was extremely painful, “for no good German woman would think of having any artificial aids, such as injections to deaden the pain, like they had in the degenerate Western democracies”.

She weaned her baby boy for a fortnight; thereafter he was removed from her side and taken to a special SS home. Trutz never saw him again. Nor, for that matter, did she see the father.

In the years that followed, she was tempted to breed more children, but she eventually fell in love and married a young German officer. When she told him about her involvement in *Lebensborn*, she was “rather surprised to find that he was not as pleased about it as he might have been”. But he could not openly criticise her, “seeing that I had been doing my duty to the *führer*”.

Ostracised children

The head of the *Lebensborn* programme, Heinrich Himmler, took an active role in its development and expansion in the early years

An estimated 17,500 babies were bred during the 10 years the programme ran

of the war. Not content with running breeding homes, his SS officers were sent to scour occupied eastern Europe in search of Aryan-looking children – those with blonde hair and blue eyes.

Such children were snatched from their parents and sent to Germany, where they were brought up by approved Nazi parents. Once teenagers, they were placed in German boarding schools and taught to be loyal servants of the Third Reich.

“It is our duty to take the children with us to remove them from their environment,” said Himmler. “Either we win over any good blood that we can use for ourselves and give it a place in our people or we destroy this blood.”

The numbers are difficult to establish, but it is estimated that some 17,500 babies were bred during the 10 years that the programme ran, principally in Germany and Norway. A conservatively estimated further 250,000 were snatched from eastern Europe. Many of the children were adopted after the war, by

which time the records of their births had been destroyed. Hildegard Trutz never discovered what became of her child and his eventual fate remains a mystery. Like so many *Lebensborn* babies, he almost certainly found himself ostracised in postwar Germany, his birth and upbringing a stigma that could never be completely expunged.

To this day, the majority have never been able to discover the dark truth about their conception and birth. Only in recent years have a few *Lebensborn* children started to speak about their early lives, sharing stories and trying to find the identities of their parents. They have set up a support organisation called Traces of Life. One of those involved, Gisela Heidenreich, reflects on why it’s important for them to speak out: “I’m appalled how pupils listen to Nazi history with incredible distance these days,” she says. “It’s our duty to tell our stories.”

But the sad truth is, all too few have stories to tell. H

Giles Milton is a bestselling author of narrative non-fiction works, including *Churchill’s Ministry of Ungentlemanly Warfare* (John Murray, 2017)

DISCOVER MORE

BOOK

► **Hitler’s Forgotten Children** by Ingrid von Oelhafen and Tim Tate (Elliott & Thompson, 2017)

Hitler's children

Thousands of girls line the streets to see Hitler in 1938. Germans born between 1910 and 1928 became the most heavily indoctrinated by the Nazis



Hitler's people

Did the German people willingly embrace the Third Reich, asks **Richard J Evans**, or was terror and violence at the core of Hitler's enormous power? >



Nazi propaganda poster: attempts to seduce public opinion were backed up by coercion

SHUTTERSTOCK

For a long time after the Second World War, historians thought of Nazi Germany as the ultimate police state – a political system in which terror and coercion were all-pervasive, freedom of action and expression had been completely suppressed, and the concentration camp, torture and death awaited anyone who failed to toe the line. They painted a dramatic picture of an entire population caught in a totalitarian net of surveillance and control that forced everyone to conform or face the consequences.

Then in the late 1960s, as the concept of totalitarianism went out of fashion, and younger German historians began to see its application to the Third Reich as an easy excuse for their parents' failure to resist the Nazis, a more nuanced picture emerged, aided by the turn of the historical profession to social history and what was known in Germany as the history of everyday life. New sources, particularly at a local level, began to show how Germans had stood up to the Nazis where their own most cherished beliefs and way of life were challenged. The Reich began to appear not as a perfectly functioning totalitarian machine but as a chaotic mass of competing institutions in which a good deal of initiative was left to the individual.

The effect of this work was to suggest powerfully that if the great mass of Germans resisted when they wanted to, then – particularly on the big questions – they also conformed when they wanted to. Voluntarism and free will were thus restored to the picture: and in the 1990s, when issues of moral responsibility came to the fore as a result of a fresh round of global war crimes trials and the emergence of compensation and restitution issues on a large scale, they began to take a dominant position in many historians' perceptions of the Third Reich.

Deviance and dissent

From the Canadian historian Robert Gellately's powerful and original work on the Gestapo it became particularly clear not

just that the secret police was a small institution with relatively few officers, most of whom seldom ventured outside their offices, but also that it relied heavily for information about deviance and dissent on denunciations by ordinary citizens.

Germany, in Gellately's words, became a society where conformity was built on a system not of surveillance by the Gestapo, but of "self-surveillance". Other historians, notably Gerhard Paul and Klaus-Michael Mallmann, two Germans who specialised in the history of the Saarland, pointed out that the Gestapo consisted overwhelmingly not of fanatical Nazi ideologues but of career policemen who had begun their careers under the Weimar Republic. It was time, they argued, to ditch "the image of the Gestapo officer as a brutal, criminal-psychopathic demon in a black leather overcoat".

The great majority of Germans, argued Gellately, not only had nothing to fear from the regime, but actively supported it by voting for it in elections and plebiscites, or, more sinisterly, through denouncing non-conformists to the Gestapo. Far from being secret places of nameless fear, the concentration camps were widely publicised; and the mass of Germans not only knew of their existence but approved of their use to stamp out deviant and marginal groups. His arguments have more recently been substantiated and taken further by the American historian Eric Johnson, whose study of Gestapo and court case files in the Rhineland has argued that the population under the Nazis "largely policed itself".

Even more strikingly, a massive and methodologically sophisticated opinion survey of thousands of older Germans undertaken by Johnson and his collaborator the German social scientist Karl-Heinz Reuband claims "that Hitler and National Socialism were so immensely popular among most Germans that intimidation and terror were rarely needed to enforce loyalty". Paradoxically, therefore, Nazi Germany now appears as a society where state repression was minimal and hardly necessary except to deal with tiny and despised minorities such as the Jews, the Jehovah's Witnesses, "criminals", "asocials", homosexuals, Roma, the mentally ill and a handful of left-wing resisters. For the overwhelming majority of Germans, this was a "dictatorship by consent".

These views have been widely accepted by historians, not least because the research on which they rest has been thorough, detailed, painstaking and sophisticated. Gellately, Johnson and their German counterparts have vastly increased our knowledge of the Third Reich and how it worked, and have put

Those who voted against the regime were arrested, beaten up, or even put into lunatic asylums

all of us in their debt. Yet, some historians, not least in Germany, are beginning to argue it has all gone too far: that the evidence, often compelling on a small scale, does not really support the sweeping conclusions that have been drawn from it.

Take, for instance, Johnson and Reuband's opinion survey. True, it shows that around half the respondents admit that they had been "positive" or "mostly positive" in their attitude to National Socialism at one time or another. But of course the respondents, mostly born between 1910 and 1928 (the cut-off date for the survey) were overwhelmingly young at the time of the Third Reich, and so belonged to the generation all historians agree was most heavily indoctrinated by the Nazis. Millions of adults in their 30s and above at the time of the Nazi seizure of power had formed their values and views well before the Third Reich came into existence and did not abandon them lightly. In Weimar Germany's last fully free national election, in November 1932, the Social Democrats and Communists between them won 13.1 million votes to the Nazis' 11.7 million. Even in March 1933, when rival parties were effectively banned from campaigning and virtually all the most active Communists had been arrested or driven into exile, the Nazis still only managed around 44 per cent of the vote.

Voting intimidation

The subsequent elections and plebiscites from 1933 to 1939 achieved their 95 to 99 per cent votes for Hitler and his policies through massive intimidation of the electorate. Gangs of stormtroopers loomed threateningly as people were handed ballot papers already marked with a "yes". Polling booths required by law for the maintenance of the secret ballot carried signs saying "only traitors enter here". Opponents of the regime were arrested before the election and only released afterwards, and marked ballot papers ensured that those who voted against the regime were subsequently arrested, beaten up, or even put into lunatic asylums, a system of coercion that was widely publicised to deter others from following suit. So pervasive was the forgery of ballot

One survey claims Hitler was so popular that intimidation and terror were rarely needed to enforce loyalty



Pressing the flesh

Hitler greets crowds in 1936. Despite the smiles, many people were intimidated into supporting his campaign



papers that in some areas the number of "yes" votes exceeded the number of electors. Yet Gellately has described these fabricated results as "remarkable" evidence of "popular backing" for the Nazi regime, while one German historian has implausibly claimed that there was no "system of manipulation" in any of the elections or plebiscites of the era.

Of course, this does not mean that in votes such as the plebiscite on the annexation of Austria in 1938 there would have been no majority for the regime, even if free opposition had been allowed and campaigning against had been legal. If there was one issue on which the majority of Germans probably supported Hitler during the 1930s it was the resurgence of German national pride and power, though contemporary reports suggest strongly that they only did so if it was clear this could be achieved without a major European war. Yet here too, another of the limitations of Johnson and Reuband's fascinating study becomes apparent. For while the people they interviewed said that they had liked the Nazis above all because they believed their claims to have abolished unemployment and reduced crime, they did

At every point, ordinary citizens came into contact with officials primed to report the slightest deviation from the norm

not mention the regime's foreign policy successes at all; by the 1990s Germans clearly no longer thought such triumphs important, or perhaps had become ashamed of their enthusiasm for them.

And what of the Gestapo? To portray them as mere pen-pushers processing denunciations from the general public is, in the words of one German historian, to trivialise them, for there is plenty of evidence of the brutal and sometimes murderous methods they used to interrogate their suspects. Others have argued that

denunciation, while shocking and significant, should not be ascribed too much importance. It was the exception, not the rule, as far as the behaviour of the vast majority was concerned. In the district of Lippe, for instance, with 176,000 inhabitants, there were no more than 292 denunciations sent to the authorities between 1933 and 1945, sometimes no more than a handful a year. There were many other means of rooting out opposition and dissent, from interrogation and torture of suspects by the Gestapo with the aim of revealing names, to the observation by Party officials of gestures of defiance like failing to give the Hitler salute. Above all, of course, denunciations would have been meaningless if the Gestapo had not actively pursued deviance and opposition. People were not controlling each other; it was the Gestapo that was exercising control.

Surveillance nation

And yet, crucially, the Gestapo was only one small, if central, part in a wider web of surveillance and control. At every point, ordinary citizens came into contact with officials primed to report the slightest

Freedom of speech?

Commentators have cited the results of elections in the 1930s as proof of popular backing for Hitler, but evidence reveals that these votes were far from fairly contested. As the extract below shows, when a poll was held in April 1938 on Hitler's recent annexation of Austria, control and intimidation were rife



Hitler's stormtroopers eye voters at a polling station in Germany's 1933 elections

Confidential report of Social Democratic agents in Württemberg:

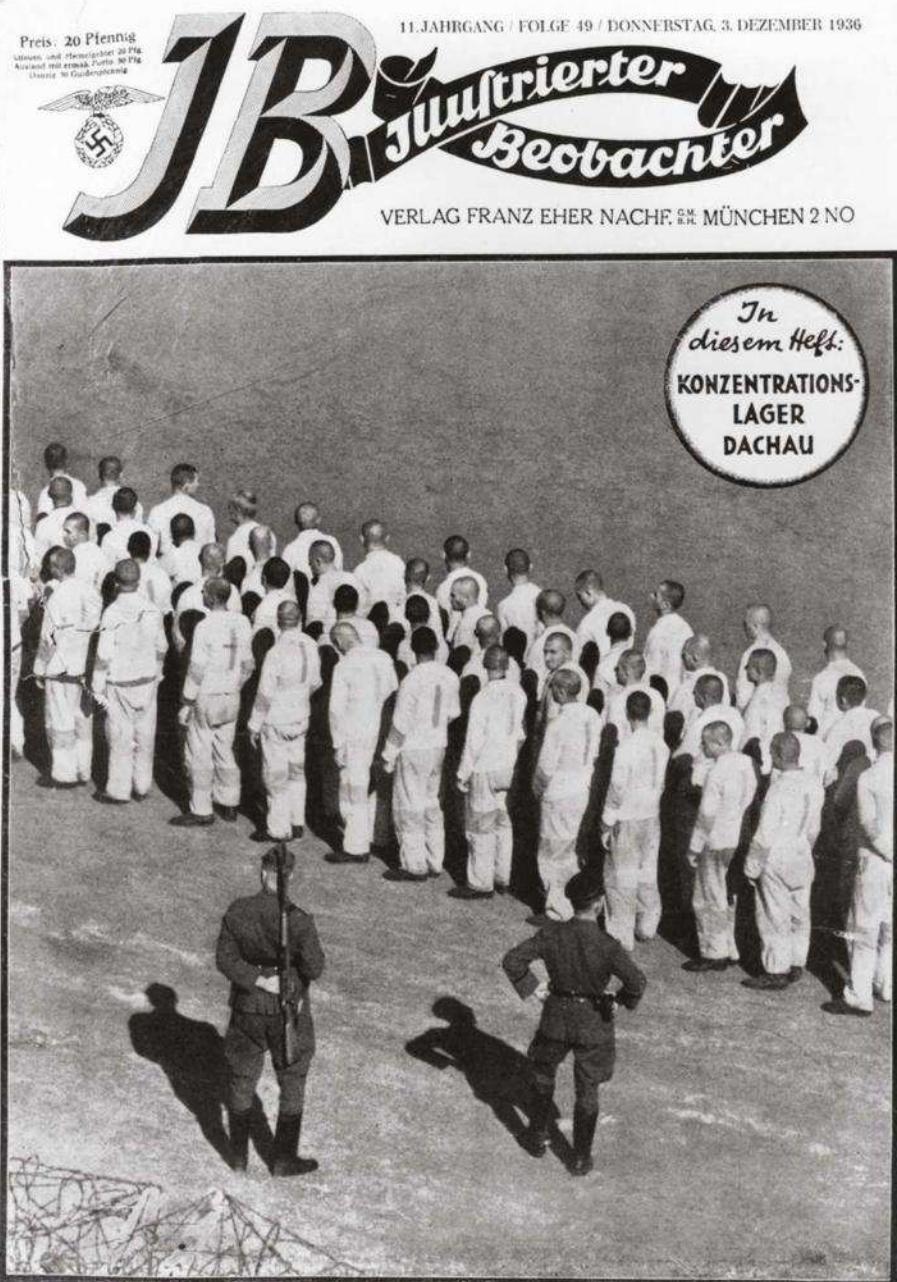
On election Sunday, after I had voted, I made an attempt to find out what was happening at the other polling stations. I had already been obliged to note in my own polling station that there was no possibility of voting without being checked out. People were voting at long tables. There were no polling booths, but the whole place was filled with uniformed men who were observing every voter to see where he put his cross. In another polling station there were indeed two booths, but they were located so far away from the tables that were generally used to vote that no elector would have dared to make use of them.

The following happened in X, a rural community with 700 inhabitants: An elderly woman went to vote. As she was

handed a ballot paper and a pencil, she dropped the pencil and the point broke off. So the returning officer gave her his green pencil and the woman used it to put her cross on the paper. In the evening, three 'no' votes were counted in the little community, and in one of them the cross was green, in other words it had been made with the returning officer's pencil. So the woman was identified as a 'no' voter. She was hauled out of her house the same evening, a placard was put on her back with the words 'I am a traitor to the people' and she was dragged from one inn to another the whole evening long, spat upon, and cursed in the wildest manner. The woman is now in hospital suffering from severe nervous shock.

A woman identified as a 'no voter' was hauled out of her house, dragged from one inn to another the whole evening long, spat upon, and cursed in the wildest manner

Taken from *Deutschland-Berichte der Sozial-demokratischen Partei Deutschlands 1934–40*, edited by Klaus Behnken (Nettelbeck, 1980)



A Nazi magazine from December 1936 reports on Dachau concentration camp

deviation from the norm, whether they were post office staff, Nazi Party officials, Hitler Youth members, tax officers, health workers, railway ticket clerks, ordinary policemen or any one of a number of servants of the Party or state. A key cog in this machine was the so-called Block Warden, a low-level Nazi official whose job it was to organise air-raid precautions in his street block, but also ensure that people hung out their flags on Hitler's birthday and did not spread inconvenient rumours or engage in dissent. There were already 200,000 of these officials by 1935. By the eve of war, virtually all Germans of all ages belonged to one or more vast Party organisation, from the women's movement to the

Labour Front, in which they were also subjected to constant observation.

Johnson and Reuband show convincingly that few of their respondents came into direct or indirect contact with the Gestapo or feared incarceration in a concentration camp. But this is a question that produces a pre-programmed answer, of course, because they did not ask anybody about other agencies of control or other means of punishment. To extrapolate from this and assume people lived freely and without fear is to go beyond the evidence. As for the camps, they were widely publicised, but of course as a threat to people, not as a comforting reminder of their invulnerability. And they were by no means the most

Terror and control formed the essential backdrop to the regime's massive propaganda campaigns

important sanction against political deviance: in the mid-1930s they only held 7,500 inmates, many of them put there for non-political offences, whereas 122,000 languished in the prisons of the state penitentiary system, 14,000 of whom had been put there for political offences. Apart from imprisonment, there were many other sanctions that could be, and were, employed against those who refused to toe the line, from withdrawal of unemployment and other social benefits to drafting into compulsory labour schemes, most notably on the defensive earthworks of the West Wall along Germany's western border.

Such sanctions could work because of the destruction of civil rights and freedoms under the Third Reich, where it was a criminal offence to criticise the government. In the first 18 months of Hitler's rule, mass, murderous violence against the regime's real or potential opponents, including not only leftists but also leading figures in Catholic, liberal and conservative politics, had had the desired effect. From mid-1934 on, terror was used more as a threat than a reality. But the threat was always there. Terror and control formed the essential backdrop to the regime's massive propaganda campaigns to win over people's hearts and minds throughout the 12 years of the Third Reich, and unless we remember this crucial fact, it is impossible to understand the extent to which these campaigns achieved their objectives.

Richard J Evans was regius professor of history at the University of Cambridge from 2008 until his retirement in September 2014

DISCOVER MORE

BOOKS

- **The Third Reich in Power, 1933–1939: How the Nazis Won Over the Hearts and Minds of a Nation** by Richard J Evans (Penguin, 2006)
- **What We Knew. Terror, Mass Murder, and Everyday Life in Nazi Germany** by Eric Johnson and Karl-Heinz Reuband (John Murray, 2005)

The Nazi serial killer

In the autumn of 1940, Berlin rail worker Paul Ogorzow embarked upon a killing spree that ended in the murder of eight women.

Roger Moorhouse recalls the hunt for Ogorzow and reveals what it tells us about life in Hitler's capital



He may be one of history's least-known serial killers, but Paul Ogorzow (left) terrorised Berlin in 1940/41. His trademark was to dump his victims' bodies on the city's train tracks

In the autumn of 1940, Berlin was uneasy. The spectacular German victories earlier that year, against France and Britain, had failed to 'win' the war, and the Nazi regime now spoke darkly of being in the "lull between two battles". Labouring under the restrictions of the blackout and rationing, and enduring the horror of aerial bombing for the first time, Berliners viewed the approaching winter with considerable apprehension.

To make matters worse, it seemed that a new peril was stalking the streets of the German capital. Over the previous few months, three women had been stabbed and two more assaulted in and around the eastern districts of Rummelsburg and Karlshorst. Then, in early October, the body of a young woman was discovered in the nearby suburb of Friedrichsfelde. The victim, a 20-year-old mother of two named Gerda Ditter, had been strangled and stabbed in the neck.

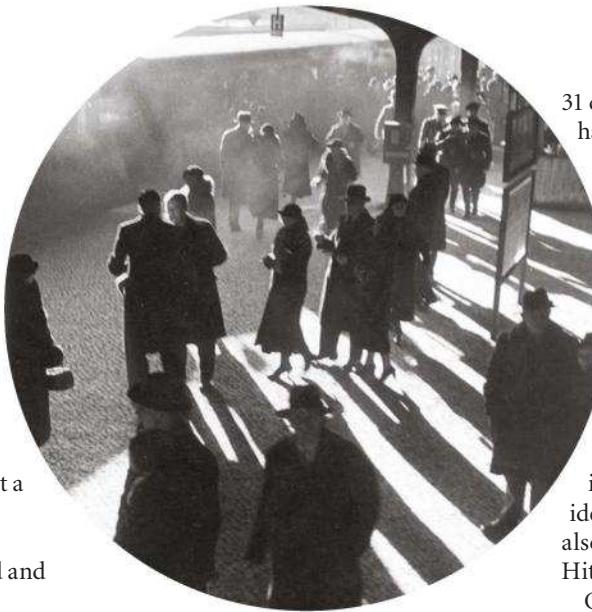
Soon there were new victims. In November, a 30-year-old woman was beaten unconscious and thrown from a moving train in the south-east of Berlin, not far from the previous attacks. She survived, but then on the morning of 4 December, two bodies were discovered. The first, that of 19-year-old Irmgard Frese, was found by the roadside, close to the railway lines in Karlshorst. She had suffered a fractured skull and had been raped. The second, that of Elfriede Franke, a 26-year-old nurse, was found with fatal head injuries barely 500 metres away. She too had been thrown from a train.

Blood on the tracks

More corpses followed. Thirty-year-old Elisabeth Büngener was discovered on 22 December, with a fractured skull, close to the railway tracks at Rahnsdorf. A week later, the body of 46-year-old Gertrud Siewert was found at Karlshorst. Like the others, she had a fractured skull and appeared to have been thrown from a train. A week after that, in early January 1941, the body of 28-year-old Hedwig Ebauer was found in similar circumstances near Wuhlheide.

All three cases, the police concluded, fitted the profile of the previous attacks and the previous three murders. They were assumed to have been the work of the unknown assailant – who was already known to all Berlin as the S-Bahn murderer.

With the German capital on tenterhooks, the killer became more sporadic in his attacks. It was to be five weeks before he struck again. On the night of 11 February,



A Berlin S-Bahn (urban railway) platform in 1936. Five years later, the S-Bahn would be synonymous with assistant signalman Paul Ogorzow's grisly crimes

The blackout proved a boon for Berlin's criminals and a nightmare for its policemen. Ogorzow exploited the darkness

a woman's body was found by the rail tracks near Rummelsburg. Johanna Voigt was 39, she had suffered horrific head injuries and, once again, she had been thrown from a train.

The next – and final – victim came five months after that. In early July 1941, the body of 35-year-old Frieda Koziol was discovered, with a fractured skull, in the same district of alleys and allotments where the first victim had been killed 10 months earlier.

That same week, however, the police got lucky. In their trawl of 5,000 railway employees, one name kept cropping up. Paul Ogorzow was a 28-year-old assistant signalman on the S-Bahn (urban railway), who had aroused the suspicion of his colleagues because of his outspoken misogyny and his habit of jumping the perimeter fence and wandering off when on duty. Ogorzow, who had been questioned before, was arrested and questioned again. Six days later, after an intense interrogation, he finally admitted to eight cases of murder, six cases of attempted murder and a further

31 cases of assault. The S-Bahn murderer had been caught.

Fear of fostering panic

Paul Ogorzow is one of history's least-known serial killers. Apart from a single semi-fictionalised account in German, his crimes have never attracted the attention of criminologists, film-makers, journalists or historians. The impulses that drove him were, it seems, purely sexual. But his crimes nonetheless provide some important pointers, not only to the ideological prejudices of the age, but also to the very nature of everyday life in Hitler's capital.

Given that the officers of Berlin's serious crime unit – the Kriminalpolizei, or 'Kripo' – did finally get their man, it may seem churlish to criticise their investigation. But, when one considers that Ogorzow worked for the railways, was known to the police, and that fully four of his eight victims were found within a mile of his home, it seems astonishing that it took 10 months – and eight murders – before he was caught.

In mitigation, it should be pointed out that the Kripo faced a number of substantial obstacles in investigating Ogorzow's crimes. The first was that Berlin's political masters were unwilling to publicise the murders for fear of fostering panic and negative headlines, so only the bare essentials of each case were allowed into the public domain. A vital source of potential intelligence was thereby sacrificed.

More seriously, there was the blackout, whose restrictions had proved a boon for Berlin's criminals and a nightmare for its policemen. The upsurge of crime during the blackout was so serious that a special police unit was established to combat it. Ogorzow, too, exploited the darkness, stalking his victims and escaping with ease under cover of night. Indeed, even when he was challenged by Kripo officers on one occasion, he was able to abscond into the shadows.

The Kripo was also hindered by the sheer number of corpses that it had to process. Accidental deaths on the railways during the blackout were actually a shockingly common occurrence. In December 1940, for instance, as the Kripo investigation into Ogorzow's crimes was getting under way, there were 28 deaths registered on the capital's railways – almost one victim for every day of the month. The vast majority of these were directly attributed to the blackout, being caused by people unwittingly stepping off platforms in the darkness, or being hit by trains while crossing unlit tracks and sidings. The Kripo had to

One officer suggested that the assailant was a Jew. Another speculated that he was a British agent

sift through every case; the blackout, it seemed, was obstructing them at every turn.

In addition to such hindrances, of course, the Kripo also laboured under a number of preconceptions and prejudices. The first was the inordinate amount of trust invested in anyone wearing a uniform and occupying an official or even semi-official position. This was to prove decisive. Although the victim of one of Ogorzow's early assaults recalled that her assailant was wearing an S-Bahn uniform overcoat, it does not seem to have occurred to the Kripo until much later that the murderer might actually be an employee of the rail network.

Instead, the Kripo investigators allowed the racial and political prejudices of Nazi Germany to direct their assessment of who might, or might not, be a suspect. One officer, for instance, suggested that the assailant might be a Jew, explaining himself with the spurious contention that large numbers of Jews were then working on German railways. Another speculated that the killer might be a British agent.

Others concluded – rather more plausibly – that their suspect might be a foreign labourer. Berlin in the autumn of 1940 was awash with foreign workers, shipped in – usually against their will – to meet the manpower demands of the city's industrial and commercial sectors. Italian, French and Polish labourers were therefore a common sight in the factories of the area at nearby Wuhlheide – where one of Ogorzow's victims had been found. It did not take an enormous leap of imagination for the Kripo to conclude that one of those labourers might be their culprit. As a result, foreign labourers' camps were placed under a nightly curfew, and extensive and time-consuming checks were made on the foreign personnel working for the railway.

Indeed, such was the Kripo's ideological and racial myopia that even when Ogorzow was within their grasp, they seem to have been unable to consider him seriously as a suspect. Rather, he appears to have impressed them. Confident and coherent, he was described as "assiduous and industrious, happily married with two children". A Nazi party and SA member to boot, he ticked all

Crime and punishment in the Third Reich

Law and order was brutally handed down under a Nazi regime on a mission to 'purify' society

Serious crime levels were reduced in the early peacetime years of the Third Reich, largely due to the new regime's more 'energetic' policing methods and the general upturn in the German economy and the national mood after 1933.

With the outbreak of war, however, such developments were reversed. The restrictions of the blackout and rationing, as well as the heightened tensions of wartime, led to an upsurge of serious crimes, of which Ogorzow's murderous spree of 1940–41 was perhaps the most salient example.

All crimes were to some degree 'politicised', not only because most

policemen viewed the world through a Nazi prism, but also because criminality was seen by Nazi ideologues as a manifestation of the racial and political corruption of the German Volk.

Politics and crime were intimately linked. And, according to the Nazi world view, offenders were not to be reformed and reintegrated into society, but excised from the body politick altogether. Petty criminals were expected to expiate their crimes through hard labour in the concentration camps, while more serious criminals often faced the death penalty – 16,000 of which were handed down for civilians alone.

In line with this brutally holistic approach, much Nazi law focused, primarily, not on the crime itself, but on the racial, social or political background of the criminal. Punishments were usually tailored according to that assessment, often using the expedient of Schutzhaft, or 'protective custody', whereby a suspect could be sent to the camps indefinitely, with no trial and no right of appeal. Hence, it was possible for a miscreant to be picked up by the police for a minor crime, pay a fine and be released, but then be picked up by the Gestapo, sent to a camp and even executed – not for what he had done, but rather for who he was.

TABLEAU DES INSIGNE PORTÉS PAR LES PRISONNIERS DES CAMPS DE CONCENTRATION (EXAMEN D'APRÈS LES EXPLICATIONS DE R. HÖSS ET LES DOCUMENTS DU CAMP)						
A.	Catégories des détenus					
	Pécheurs	Membres de organisations politiques	Espions	Asociaux	Crimes commis	Homosexuels
Conseil de laur	Red triangle	Purple triangle	Blue triangle	Black triangle	Green triangle	Pink triangle
Intérêt porté par les Juifs jusqu'à la fin de l'année 1944	Red star	Yellow star	Blue star	Yellow star	Green star	Yellow star
Intérêt porté par les Juifs à partir de la fin de l'année 1944	Red triangle	Purple triangle	Blue triangle	Black triangle	Green triangle	Pink triangle
B.						
Insignes particuliers						
N° du camp	Ensigne indiquant qu'il est porté par un prisonnier juif	Ensigne indiquant le nom d'un soldat français	Affiliation à la compagnie d'infanterie	Rabbinat ou autre	Signes d'extase	Décret ou décret
62441	P	F	!	IL	●	▲
Remarque : Les abréviations d'insigne portent l'insigne. Il n'y a pas d'explication pour les symboles des insignes du tableau B qui ont été ajoutés à titre d'exemple. Elles changent avec la catégorie du prisonnier dans le tableau A. Le chiffre viene être associé aux détenus conformément à leur porteur (holocauste.org)						

their boxes as a solid, upstanding member of German society. As a result, the investigation against him was initially suspended.

Even Ogorzow's confession betrayed a flavour of the twisted times in which he lived. Firstly, it appears that he had believed he would be protected from prosecution by a childhood friend who was an officer in the SS. More sinister still, Ogorzow even claimed that his murderous behaviour had only begun following an unconventional treatment for gonorrhoea carried out by a Jewish doctor. Such crude attempts to chime with the zeitgeist cut little ice with the Kripo or with the prosecutors of the Nazi court. Ogorzow was described at his trial as "a killer of a completely cold and calculating nature, who ruthlessly exploited the

blackout to satisfy his depraved sexual urges". No mention was made, by the way, of the bungled Kripo investigation.

By the end of the same month in which he had committed his last murder, Paul Ogorzow had been tried, convicted and executed by guillotine in Plötzensee prison. Justice, it seemed, had been done. With hindsight, however, it is not hard to conclude that justice might have been done a lot sooner had Hitler's policemen not been hampered by the exigencies of war, and so grievously blinkered by the prejudices of the Nazi world view. ■

Roger Moorhouse is the author of several books, including *Berlin at War: Life and Death in Hitler's Capital, 1939–45* (Bodley Head, 2010)

Hitler's jazz band

The Nazis despised jazz but, as **Dan Cossins** reveals, that didn't stop them harnessing its 'degenerate' appeal in pro-Nazi propaganda

After the darkness and deprivations of the First World War, Weimar Germany came alive to the sounds of jazz and swing. By the mid-1930s, as the shadow of the swastika fell across the country, American-style jazz was all the rage. Naturally, though, given its association with blacks and Jews, the Nazis loathed jazz.

Fearful its 'jungle' rhythms and improvised breaks would undermine Aryan morals and discipline, Hitler launched a blitzkrieg against this 'degenerate music'. His propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels, ordered the banning of jazz from radio broadcasts in 1935. Later, when the United States entered the war, Goebbels outlawed the selling and playing of American jazz records. Swing was officially *verboten*.

Goebbels wasn't stupid, though. While officially condemning the music, he was quietly plotting to hijack its debauched appeal to peddle Hitler's message abroad. The outcome was Charlie and his Orchestra, a Nazi-sponsored swing band playing American hits sprinkled with pro-Nazi lyrics in an attempt to undermine the morale of Allies listening in their barracks and living rooms.

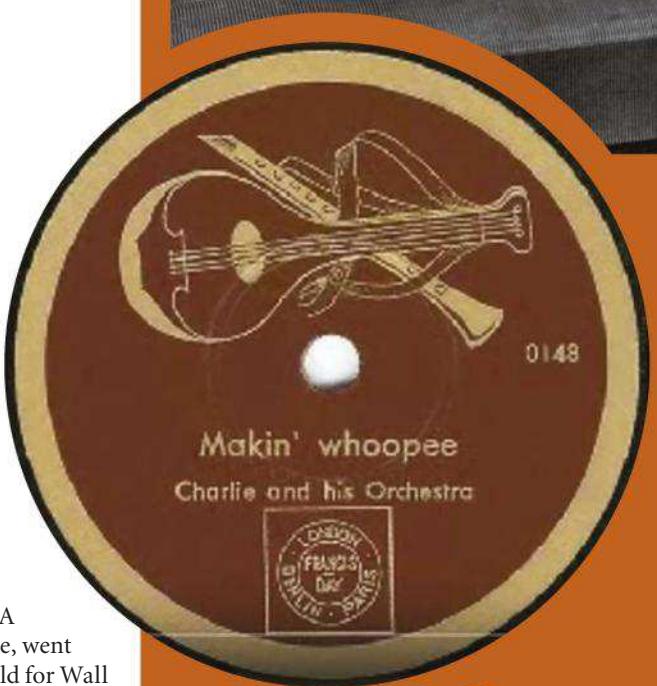
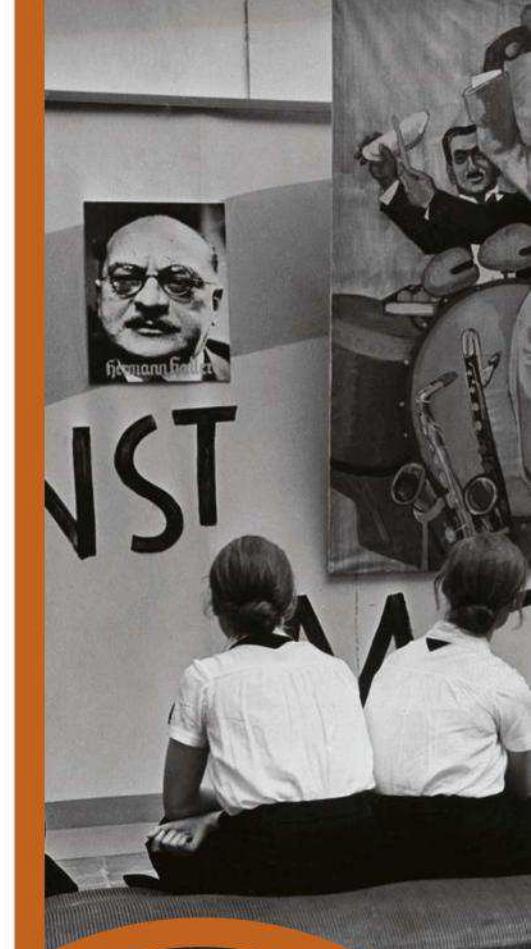
Saxophonist Lutz Templin assembled the band from the best German and European musicians of the day, and selected an English speaker called Karl 'Charlie' Schwedler as the frontman. For lyrical

inspiration, they turned to 'Lord Haw-Haw', who was employed as a radio host by the Propaganda Ministry. In January 1940, Charlie and his Orchestra struck up a tune and beamed their strange musical concoction from Berlin to Britain for the first time, filling in the gaps between Lord Haw-Haw's Churchill-baiting skits.

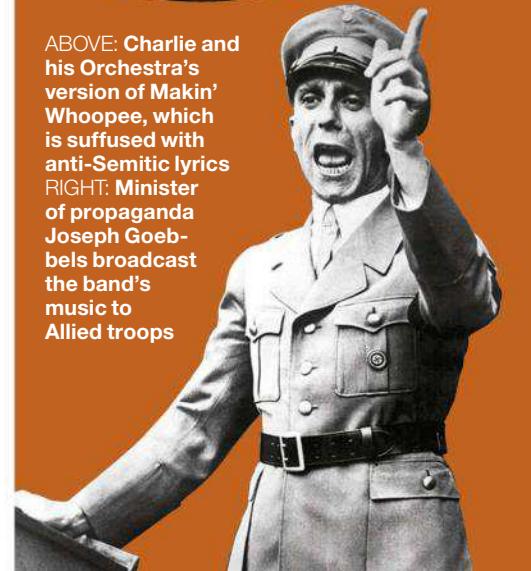
The idea was to enthrall listeners with swing and then hit them with messages of Aryan supremacy, Churchill's hopelessness, and Jewish conspiracies. A parody on the standard 'I've Got A Pocketful of Dreams', for example, went like this: "I'm gonna save the world for Wall Street / Gonna fight for Russia, too / I'm fighting for democracy / I'm fighting for the Jew."

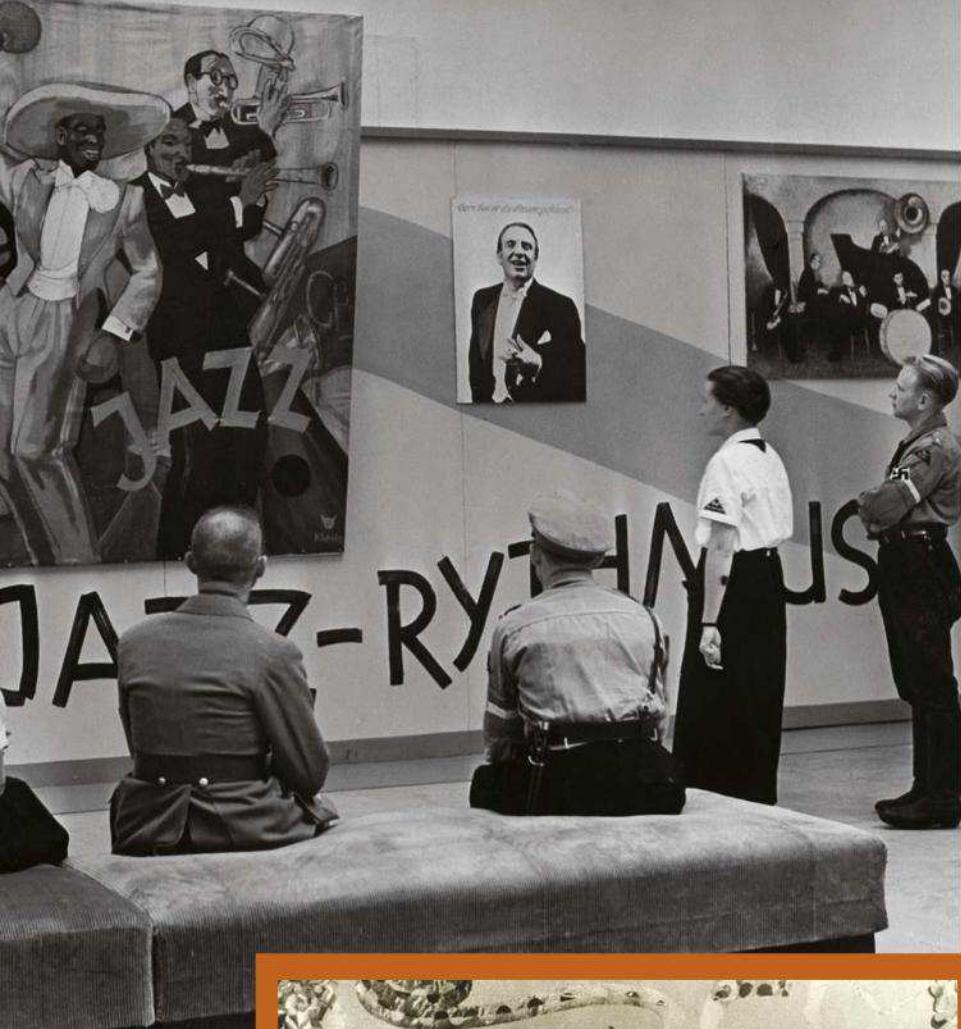
And 'You're Driving Me Crazy' was

The idea was to enthrall listeners with swing and then hit them with messages of Aryan supremacy

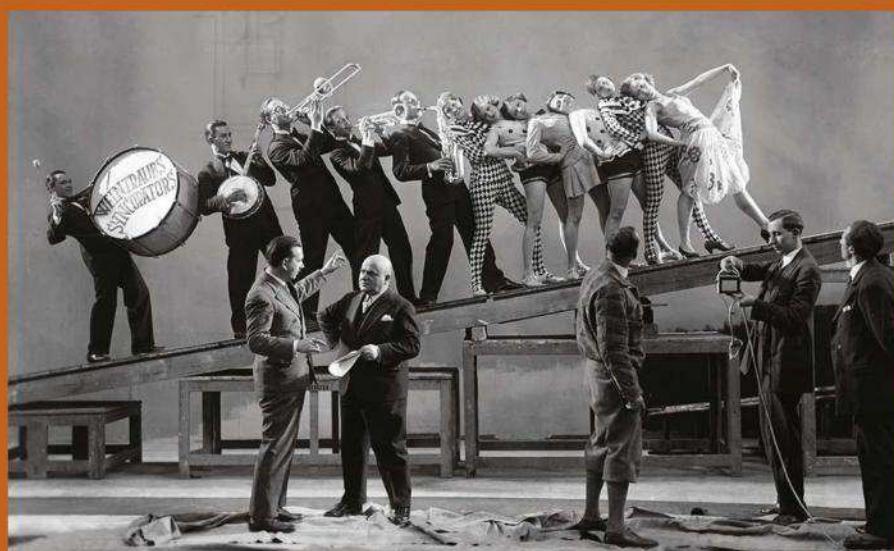


ABOVE: Charlie and his Orchestra's version of Makin' Whoopee, which is suffused with anti-Semitic lyrics
RIGHT: Minister of propaganda Joseph Goebbels broadcast the band's music to Allied troops





ABOVE: An exhibition on 'degenerate' music, Düsseldorf, 1938
RIGHT: 'Charlie' Schwedler (centre), who led the propaganda jazz band
BELOW: Other musicians such as the mainly Jewish Weintraubs Syncopators were forced into exile



rephrased like so, in reference to Churchill: "Yes, the Germans are driving me crazy / I thought I had brains / But they shot down my planes."

Charlie and his Orchestra was the best jazz band in the Third Reich. As Czech accordionist Kamil Behounek, who was drafted into the band in May 1943 as a music arranger, recalled: "Here was this big dance orchestra with three trumpets, three trombones, four saxes, a full rhythm group. And they were swinging it!"

Charlie's musicians worked five days a week, performing 'propaganda swing' in the mornings and Nazi-approved songs for domestic audiences in the afternoon. During the course of the war, they broadcast hundreds of times to Britain and to Allied troops in Europe. The Nazis even distributed their records to prisoner of war camps.

As the conflict wore on, though, and the composition of the band changed, it came to be less than exclusively Aryan. "There were even half-Jews and gypsies there, freemasons, Jehovah's Witnesses, homosexuals and communists – not exactly the type of people the Nazis normally wanted to play cards with," recalled Evelyn Kunneke, a singer who worked for an SS propaganda unit.

"But because their work was classified as being important to the war effort, they sat at music-stands in Berlin, and not behind barbed wire, and made swing."

By autumn 1943, intensified Allied bombing raids on Berlin had forced the band to relocate to Stuttgart. Still they swung on, though, right up to April 1945.

When the war was over, Templin quickly found work playing clubs across American-occupied Germany. As for Schwedler, one account has it that he became a businessman and lived out his last days in Bavaria, while another claims he emigrated to the United States in 1960. Whatever the truth, 'Charlie' and his band left the most bizarre of musical legacies: the swinging, anti-Semitic sounds of Nazi jazz. ■

Dan Cossins is a journalist and features editor for *New Scientist*

DISCOVER MORE

BOOKS

- **Hitler's Airwaves: The Inside Story of Nazi Radio Broadcasting and Propaganda Swing** by Horst Bergmeier and Rainer Lotz (Yale University Press, 1997)
- **Different Drummers: Jazz in the Culture of Nazi Germany** by Michael Kater (Oxford University Press, 2003)

Schalke's Otto Tibulski (far left) tackles Rapid Vienna's hat trick scorer Franz Binder in the championship final, Berlin, 22 June 1941

The Nazi Final



In 1941, a dramatic match took place between Germany and Austria, on the exact same day that Nazi forces launched Operation Barbarossa. **Roger Moorhouse** tells the story

It is one of the most important dates in modern history. At dawn on 22 June 1941, Nazi Germany launched Operation Barbarossa and invaded the Soviet Union. Over three million Axis troops crossed Stalin's western border from the Baltic to the Black Sea, beginning what would become the longest and costliest military campaign of all time.

Yet, for those civilians back home in Berlin that weekend, Barbarossa would not have been the only – or indeed even the most important – topic of conversation. The war was already almost two years old by that point, and had become rather commonplace; the backdrop against which everyday life was played out. For all its later portent, the invasion of the Soviet Union was – initially at least – just another act in the ongoing drama.

The real talk of the town in the German capital would have been the football championship final – scheduled for that same Sunday afternoon, 22 June 1941, at the Olympic Stadium. Here reigning champions Schalke 04, the darlings of the Nazi regime, would face Rapid Vienna, the star team of Austria – the country Germany had invaded in March 1938. It was a game that promised much, not least because of the political rivalry that had accompanied each team's achievements. It would certainly not disappoint.

German football had undergone something of a renaissance under the Nazis. The game's structure had been thoroughly revamped, and this had contributed to a flourishing of talent and a growth of interest in the sport, something which the regime – ever mindful of the propaganda potential of such 'people's theatre' – had been keen to exploit. Consequently, the star players emerged as household names, to be held up as models of sporting endeavour and Aryan excellence. This renaissance coincided almost exactly with the rise of Schalke 04 from the tough, industrial suburbs of Gelsenkirchen in the Ruhr, western Germany. Defeated in the championship final of 1933, Schalke returned the following year, when they beat the then favourites FC Nürnberg. It would be the start of a remarkable sequence. They would feature in seven of the next eight championship finals – including that of 1941 – winning five of them.

Schalke's opponents in the 1941 final – Rapid Vienna – also sprang from a rich tradition. The Austrian national squad had been one of the established forces of 1930s international football, and Austrian clubs soon made their presence felt in the German league after the Anschluss of 1938. Rapid made an immediate impression, winning

the German cup that same year. They were followed by Admira Vienna, who unsuccessfully contested the 1939 championship final. Rapid again featured in the final stages of the championship in 1940, finishing as losing semi-finalists. Their presence in the championship showdown of 1941, therefore, was evidence of a growing trend.

Background of violence

In addition to this sporting rivalry, the match was also coloured by a regional rivalry of surprising virulence. Despite Hitler's own Austrian origins, the north-south divide – Protestant against Catholic and 'Prussian' against Austrian – still loomed large in German popular culture. The north German habit of looking down on the Austrians as 'country cousins' was matched by an equally entrenched Austrian view of the northern Germans – or 'Prussians' – as uncultured, arrogant arrivistes.

These resentments found their most obvious expression in Austrian football. Anti-'Prussian' and anti-German sentiment was soon being voiced in Austrian stadiums, a development which was exacerbated by the numerous high-level meetings between Viennese and German clubs in competition. The tensions were further fuelled by the mysterious death, in 1939, of the Austrian

star player, Matthias Sindelar, who was supposedly murdered as he refused to play for Hitler's Germany. Physical confrontations, too, were commonplace. In 1940, for instance, fights broke out at numerous matches with German teams, often accompanied by anti-'Prussian' demonstrations. Neither was the violence confined to the terraces. One game, between a Luftwaffe team from Hamburg and a Viennese side, was marred by a string of violent incidents. Finally, the Austrian goalkeeper was stretchered off after a series of brutal challenges. He later died in hospital.

Such regional rivalries could easily spill over into anti-regime resentment and were most often directed towards Schalke. Schalke had become closely identified with the Nazi administration as the latter sought to capitalise on its success. Its players were granted honorary ranks in the Nazi paramilitary force, and its stars – such as Ernst Kuzorra or Fritz Szepan – were used as mouthpieces for Nazi propaganda.

Any fixture between Schalke and a Viennese team, then, could be a highly charged affair. Kuzorra was punched to the ground in one game, while the meeting between Admira Vienna and Schalke in November 1940 sparked rioting in which the German team's bus was destroyed and a prominent Nazi's limousine vandalised. For all these reasons, the championship final of 1941 was one of the most eagerly anticipated of the era.

Incredible comeback

In bright sunshine, that Sunday afternoon, 95,000 spectators took their seats, tightly packed into the vast concrete bowl of the Olympic Stadium; countless thousands more followed the game on radio. After a brief sport display from Hitler Youth, the players emerged to a storm of applause – Schalke in royal blue with white trim, Rapid in green with black shorts. They lined up, joined in a hearty rendition of the national anthem and gave the Hitler salute. Though the stadium announcer sought to remind those present of the soldiers fighting at the front, few had anything but football on their minds. The Rapid midfielder Leopold Gernhardt, for instance, could not recall any of his teammates making any mention of Barbarossa that day.

As the game got under way, Schalke dominated the early exchanges, scoring two goals in the opening seven minutes. For the spectators, it must have seemed that a repeat of the 1939 final was on the cards – when Schalke

The tensions were fuelled by the mysterious death of an Austrian player who refused to play for Hitler's Germany

had thrashed Admira Vienna 9–0. But Rapid steadied themselves and slowly found their way into the match, even squandering the chance to score from the penalty spot shortly before half-time.

The second half began much as the first had ended; with Rapid pressure and a number of efforts on goal. Yet, Schalke weathered the storm and on 58 minutes appeared to have made the decisive breakthrough when winger Heinz Hinz scored to make it 3–0.

What followed, however, was remarkable. With the game apparently decided, Rapid staged a dramatic comeback. Though famed for their team spirit – the so-called Rapidgeist – and their ability to turn games around, this would nonetheless be their most memorable achievement. On 60 minutes, they snatched a goal through the striker Georg Schors. Then, a minute later, with Schalke seemingly stung, Rapid's talisman, Franz Binder, scored a fabulous free kick and then converted a penalty on 63 minutes to bring the Austrians level.

Some 95,000 spectators watched as FC Rapid Vienna staged an amazing comeback from 3–0 down to defeat Nazi darlings FC Schalke



As one player later noted, the equaliser hit Schalke hard: "Before we knew what had happened, it was 3–3. We couldn't understand it. It was like a bad dream." With the game then – implausibly – evenly poised, Rapid seized the initiative with Binder, once again, scoring with a cannonball of a free kick to secure a hat trick for himself and put Rapid 4–3 ahead. Within ten minutes, Rapid had remarkably turned a three-goal deficit into a lead that – with Schalke visibly deflated – they would not relinquish. Rapid Vienna became the first, and only, 'non-German' champions of Germany.

Though free of violence, the game nonetheless had more than its share of controversy, spawning numerous conspiracy theories and urban myths. The result, it was said, was fixed, as a sop to the Austrians, and the referee had been excessively generous in awarding two free kicks and two penalties to Rapid. As if to confirm such suspicions, it was claimed that the Schalke captain, Kuzorra, initially refused to accept his runners-up medal, and then berated the Nazi officials present with the words: "That was politics, not sport."

Rapid, too, developed their own mythology, based largely on the belief that the regime would have preferred a Schalke victory. By way of proof, it was reported that the Nazi sport organisation had declared that "the better team had lost", while one player even claimed to have seen the trophy at half-time – with Schalke's name already engraved upon it. More significantly perhaps, Rapid's match-winner, Franz Binder, was called up for military service on the Russian Front soon after, and never played for Hitler's

'Greater Germany' again. Schalke's star players, in contrast, were not generally called up for frontline service.

Of course, such claims, extrapolations and conspiracy theories are common in sport and even more prevalent in a society living in dictatorship and war. They are, therefore, more indicative of the difficult times in which the game was played, than proof of any genuine political manipulation. Yet, the sheer virulence of the controversy surrounding the game reveals a deeper truth.

For all the much-vaunted unity of the Nazi 'people's community', divisions clearly remained. Within Hitler's Germany, local, regional and even political rivalries continued to flourish and even – occasionally – exploded into rancour and violence. ■

Roger Moorhouse is the author of *Berlin at War: Life and Death in Hitler's Capital, 1939–45* (Vintage, 2011)

FOLLOWING

Why did the Nazis fight to the death?

Continuing the German fight despite inevitable defeat

Hitler's philosophers

Why some of Germany's greatest minds supported the Third Reich

The women who flew for Hitler

The extraordinary parallel lives of two Nazi test pilots

Hitler at home

How propagandists sought to soften the führer's image

The dark charisma of Adolf Hitler

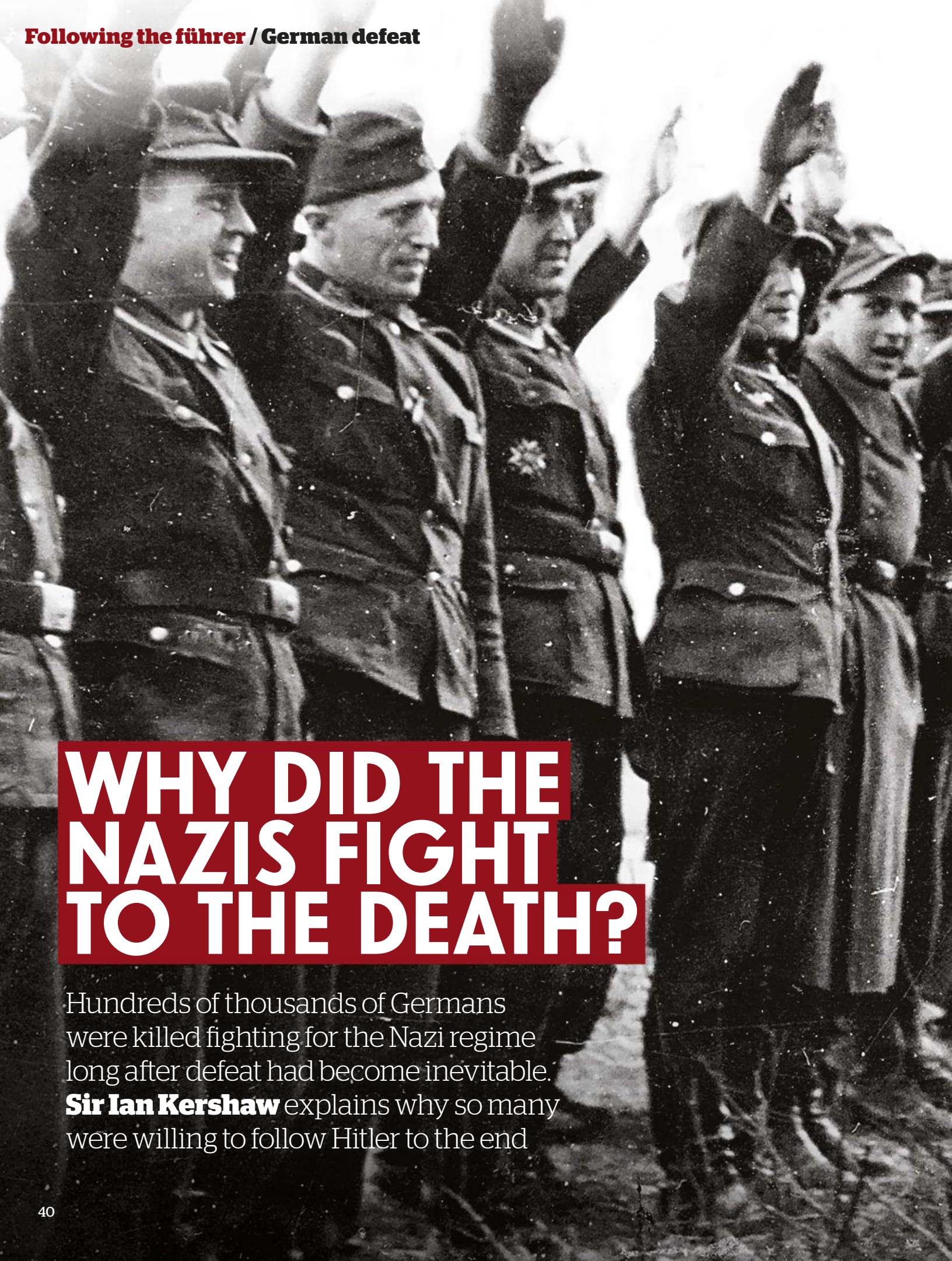
Was Hitler more than the frenzied madman of popular perception?

Dear Mr Hitler

What letters to the führer tell us about his relationship with his people

THE FÜHRER





WHY DID THE NAZIS FIGHT TO THE DEATH?

Hundreds of thousands of Germans were killed fighting for the Nazi regime long after defeat had become inevitable.

Sir Ian Kershaw explains why so many were willing to follow Hitler to the end

Defiant gesture

German troops salute Hitler in March 1945.
This was to be the German leader's final
visit to the front line – he would commit
suicide at the end of April



On 18 April 1945, a 19-year-old theology student, Robert Limpert, decided to act to prevent the senseless destruction of the picturesque town of Ansbach, southern Germany. He had already taken big risks by circulating leaflets pleading for the surrender of the town without a fight. Now he went further, cutting communication wires to a Wehrmacht unit outside the town, but was spotted doing so by two boys from the Hitler Youth. Following arrest by the local police, he was brought before the local military commandant, a Luftwaffe colonel with a doctorate in physics – and a fanatical Nazi. The commandant immediately set up a three-man tribunal which lost no time in sentencing Limpert to death.

As a noose was placed round his neck outside the town hall, the young man struggled free, but was caught within a hundred yards, kicked, punched and pulled by the hair before being hauled back to the place of execution. No one in the small crowd that had gathered and witnessed the scene stirred to help him. After further moments of torment when the rope broke, Limpert was finally hoisted to his death. The commandant said the body had to be left hanging “till it stinks”. He then fled from the town on a requisitioned bicycle. Four hours later, the Americans entered Ansbach without a shot being fired and cut down Robert Limpert’s body.

The Limpert tragedy was not just a matter of the rabid fanaticism of the Nazi town commandant. The local constabulary and civilian administration played their part, choosing to carry out what they saw as their duty, even though they knew that American occupation was only hours away. Civilians showed Limpert no sympathy. In many other places too, while most people were desperate to avoid futile destruction in what were obviously the dying days of the Nazi regime, there were some who even now prepared to back the savage repression of real or presumed opponents of Nazism. Similar horror stories were registered in numerous German towns and cities in the last weeks of Nazi rule.

Amid mounting military collapse, in areas not yet occupied by enemy forces the regime still somehow functioned in limited fashion, even in April 1945. The Reich had shrunk by now to little more than a sliver of territory. Communications and transport were near total breakdown, millions were without gas, electricity and water. But there was no descent into anarchy.

The state bureaucracy functioned, if under enormous difficulties. Wages were paid in

April 1945. A leading academic body was still awarding grants to foreign students, seen even now as an investment for German influence in a ‘new Europe’. Newspapers, though drastically reduced in size and number, were still published. Improvised attempts were made to deliver post.

There was even some escapist entertainment. The Berlin Philharmonic held its last concert on 12 April, four days before the Soviet assault on the capital began. Citizens of Stuttgart could shut out their trauma for an hour or two and see the musical comedy *The Woman of My Dreams* at the cinema, only days before the city’s surrender on 22 April. The last football match of the war took place on 23 April, when Bayern Munich beat their local rivals, TSV 1860 Munich, 3–2. It was hardly Premiership standard, but remarkable that football was played at all only a week before Hitler’s suicide.

Signs of disintegration

Above all, the Wehrmacht kept fighting. Losses were staggering. Between 300,000 and 400,000 German soldiers were dying every month as the end of the war approached. But there was no widespread mutiny, as there had been in 1918. Most soldiers by now, like the civilian population, longed for the end of the war. Signs of disintegration were unmistakable. Thousands of soldiers deserted, despite draconian punishment if they were caught. They were nonetheless a small minority. The Wehrmacht continued to function. Had it not done so, the regime would have collapsed. But generals still issued their orders, however hopeless the circumstances. And the orders were obeyed.

The writing had been on the wall ever since summer 1944 when the western Allies consolidated their landing in Normandy and the Red Army advanced deep into Poland. But the German leadership, not just Hitler, held on to the belief that, if not outright victory, something at least could still be gained from the war. New, devastating weapons, it was thought, were on the way. If some terrible damage could be inflicted upon their enemies, the thinking

Fighting on to the end in a lost cause is rare. Nearly all wars in modern history finished with some form of negotiation



Irresistible advance
American troops at the bridge at Remagen, near Bonn, 22 March 1945. The Allies' crossing of the Rhine made a German defeat in the west a near certainty. Yet still the Nazis fought on

ran, the unholy wartime coalition of the western powers and the Soviet Union would split apart. The Allies would then be driven to negotiations, leaving Germany with some of her territorial gains intact.

Many German leaders only slowly and reluctantly abandoned such illusions. Only following the swift collapse of the last major German offensive in the Ardennes and, even more calamitously, the devastating onslaught of the Red Army in January 1945, was it obvious that the war was irredeemably lost. Once the western Allies crossed the Rhine in March, the advance into the heartlands of the Reich was rapid. In the east, the Red Army was poised for the final assault on Berlin. There was no rationale to continuing the war. But the Wehrmacht fought on.



Fighting on to the very end in an obviously lost cause is rare. Nearly all wars in modern history, like the First World War, finish with some form of negotiation. Even authoritarian regimes, plainly seen to be heading for the buffers, are not normally able to hold out to the point of total destruction. Usually, they are toppled beforehand, either by revolution from below or, more frequently, by internal coup within the ruling elites. But Nazi Germany refused to surrender. Why?

It is often claimed that the Allied demand for 'unconditional surrender', laid down at Casablanca in January 1943, ruled out all prospects of German capitulation. It certainly played into the hands of propaganda as the regime exploited it to justify the fight to the end. But it did not eliminate



By May 1945 the Nazis' vast empire had shrunk to a few slivers of land. Despite this, German generals still issued their orders – and most soldiers obeyed them



TIMELINE

The Road to Defeat



Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg (left) attempts to assassinate Hitler and launch a coup d'état. Its failure further radicalises the Nazi regime and strengthens its internal hold.

20 July 1944



Following the breakthrough in France in mid-August, the first American troops reach German soil, just outside Aachen. The city only falls, however, on 21 October.

11 September 1944

A last major German offensive, planned for months, is launched through the Ardennes. Despite early successes, it rapidly becomes clear that it has disastrously failed.



A German soldier in action during the Battle of the Bulge, December 1944

18 October 1944

Soviet troops cross the German frontier in East Prussia, committing atrocities against the population. They are forced back before the end of the month.

16 December 1944

The Red Army's huge offensive begins, reaching the Oder by the end of the month, 50 miles from Berlin. The German population flees in panic.

12 January 1945

Summary court martials are established within Germany. They are a sign of the intensified terror directed at the German population itself as well as perceived internal enemies.

15 February 1945

The beginning of the Red Army's final assault on Berlin. The capital is soon encircled, and Soviet troops battle their way towards Hitler's Reich Chancellery.

7 March 1945

US troops find the bridge at Remagen intact and are able to cross the Rhine. The breakthrough allows the subsequent swift penetration into German heartlands.

16 April 1945

With Soviet troops closing in, Hitler commits suicide. Grand-Admiral Dönitz (right) learns the next day that he has been nominated as the new head of state.

With the Wehrmacht at an end, Dönitz is compelled to concede total capitulation, signed first at Rheims then shortly afterwards repeated at Karlshorst, near Berlin.

30 April 1945



7 May 1945

Between 300,000 and 400,000 German soldiers were dying every month in the final stages of the war

expectations of peace negotiations. Most Nazi leaders proposed at one time or another approaching the western Allies, or even the Russians, to seek a way out of the impending doom. But Hitler adamantly refused to contemplate negotiation except from a position of strength – a prospect diminishing by the day. So should we look no further than Hitler himself, the supreme leader who was prepared to take his country into the abyss rather than entertain another ‘cowardly’ surrender like that, as he saw it, of November 1918?

Hitler’s intransigence was obviously crucial. And because he had no future after any negotiated surrender, holding out for him was easy. He knew it would have to end in his suicide. But how could he continue to exercise such baleful power when all knew that his days were numbered? Why was no further attempt made to kill him, remove him, or at least confront him with an alternative to total destruction? An answer takes us beyond the dictator himself, to the structures of Nazi rule and the mentalities that underpinned them.

A big part of the answer is undoubtedly terror. Fear was a rational response to a terroristic and terrifying regime. From February 1945 onwards, the regime’s inbuilt terror exploded in a final paroxysm of unbound fury directed at all who stood in its way. The unrestrained readiness to extreme violence even against its own citizens ruled out the possibility of a revolution from below, as had happened in 1918.

Germany’s population in 1945 was browbeaten, exhausted and resigned, but not rebellious. The terror apparatus still functioned. Some 15,000 German soldiers were executed for desertion (compared with just 18 in the First World War), the number rising steeply as the end of the war approached. Itinerant drumhead courts left a trail of arbitrary executions, also of civilians. Any defeatist comment could invite swift and brutal reprisal.

Hundreds of German citizens fell victim to untrammeled violence in the last weeks of the Nazi regime as local party representatives, with their last act of power, ensured that longstanding opponents would not live to enjoy their downfall. Now as before, however, the targets of the worst of the murderous violence were those dubbed racial and political enemies. Foreign workers and prisoners, seen as security threats, were killed mercilessly. Aimless ‘death marches’ through German townships, in full view of the population, left concentration camp prisoners, many among them Jews, wholly at the whim of their guards, who dispatched them without a thought. An estimated

quarter of a million are thought to have perished on the marches. Most Germans watched passively, whether from lack of sympathy with the marchers or for fear of repercussions should they try to offer any assistance.

Widespread detestation

Terror is not, however, a full explanation for Germany’s continuation of the war. The regime’s droves of petty functionaries and officials, who continued to serve it and make it work, were not terrorised. Nor were military leaders. Generals, though often dismissed, were not executed (apart from those involved in the Stauffenberg attempted coup in 1944).

It was not, though, as is often claimed, that a consensus behind the regime held until the end. Countless internal reports provide testimony to the widespread detestation of the party, and even the collapse of belief in Hitler, long before the end. However, there was an obvious ambivalence. Though Germans overwhelmingly longed for the war to end, few wanted foreign occupation, least of all by the feared Russians. In fighting to their utmost to fend off the enemy, Germans were, however much they might have hated the regime, actually helping it to continue functioning.

The terrible war in the east created a kind of negative integration, for soldiers and civilians alike. The justified horror at falling into Soviet hands made soldiers fight like demons, seldom by now from Nazi convictions, but for family, comrades and ultimately for their own survival.

In any case, there was no alternative. Whatever their individual feelings and motives, ordinary soldiers had little choice but to obey the orders of their officers or face execution as deserters. Petrified civilians fled wherever they could, or otherwise braced themselves for the worst. Suicide numbers rocketed, especially in eastern parts of Germany. Estimates suggest that some 20 per cent of women were raped as many Red Army soldiers did their best to match the caricatures of Nazi propaganda.

In the west, there was no equivalent fear. Defeatism was widespread but the Wehrmacht fought on here too, despite obvious indications of intense war-weariness. Apart from the determination to

prevent Germany’s occupation by foreign powers – and notwithstanding the small numbers of outright Nazi fanatics, especially in the Waffen-SS – fighting on had become an end in itself.

In the last months of the war, German citizens were oppressed, marshalled and corralled as never before by the party and its myriad affiliates which had occupied all organisational space. Given wide-ranging powers to orchestrate all civil defence measures in their areas, the Gauleiter – the hard-bitten Nazi regional chieftains who had burnt their boats with the regime – and their subordinates at district and local levels, acted brutally to maintain control.

Local military commanders and party officials took matters more and more into their own hands. Whether a town or village surrendered without a fight or was nearly obliterated in pointless last-minute shows of defiance rested on the behaviour of those with power and influence in the locality. Despite dire threats facing any perceived ‘defeatist’, few wanted to end their lives in a show of futile ‘heroism’ and see their homes and workplaces blown up senselessly. Many mayors and even party functionaries, often following the initiative of groups of respectable ‘worthies’ in a township, defied orders to fight on, though this could bring savage reprisals if local desperadoes – usually party fanatics or SS units with nothing to lose – gained the upper hand.

Why was there no further attempt to change the regime from above after the failed plot of July 1944? Crucial was the radicalisation of the structures of power since then. Beneath Hitler, four Nazi grandes, three of them brutal fanatics, the fourth a power-hungry organisational genius, ran Germany in the last months.

Martin Bormann, secretary to the Führer and head of the party administration, extended the controlling hand of the party over almost all facets of daily life. Joseph Goebbels combined the key areas of propaganda and manpower mobilisation. Without the million extra men that he dredged up by the end of 1944, the immense losses suffered by the Wehrmacht could not have been replaced. Heinrich Himmler, the head of the SS and the Reich’s enormous security apparatus, now penetrated the Wehrmacht too, adding to his vast powers the command of the Replacement Army, from whose headquarters the attempted coup in July 1944 had been planned.

Last but not least among the quadruprivate, Albert Speer, minister of armaments of war production, performed near miracles of organisation in ensuring that the troops still had weapons to fight with. If Speer had





On the run
A woman flees explosions rocking a German town in 1945.
Many towns were flattened as a result of last-minute shows of defiance

worked half as hard, Germany could not have held out for remotely so long.

Crucially, the regime could depend too upon the backing of the military leadership. At the very top, Field-Marshal Keitel and General Jodl, the key figures in the high command of the Wehrmacht, remained ultra-loyalists, firm believers in Hitler. After the failed assassination plot, Nazi penetration of the armed forces was intensified. Many middle-ranking officers had swallowed tenets of Nazi doctrine in the Hitler Youth and were now doubly anxious to display their loyalty. Only loyalists were left, too, among the generals in command positions. Few were fully-fledged Nazis, but their nationalist mentalities easily blended with Nazi dogma.

Some generals had serious disputes with Hitler and were dismissed. But even where they disagreed fundamentally with Hitler's tactics, they did not doubt his right to issue them. Divided among themselves, they were neither temperamentally nor organisationally capable of challenging Hitler. Some, most notably the extraordinarily brutal Field-Marshal Schörner, remained fanatical backers of Hitler.

Even those who had broken inwardly with Hitler could not contemplate doing other than their utmost in the defence of the Reich, seen as their highest duty. Faced with increasingly impossible orders for the defence of Berlin, Colonel-General Heinrici, for instance, felt that to refuse to carry them

out was to commit treason. Even in late April 1945, Field-Marshal Kesselring rejected moves to surrender in Italy as long as Hitler was still alive.

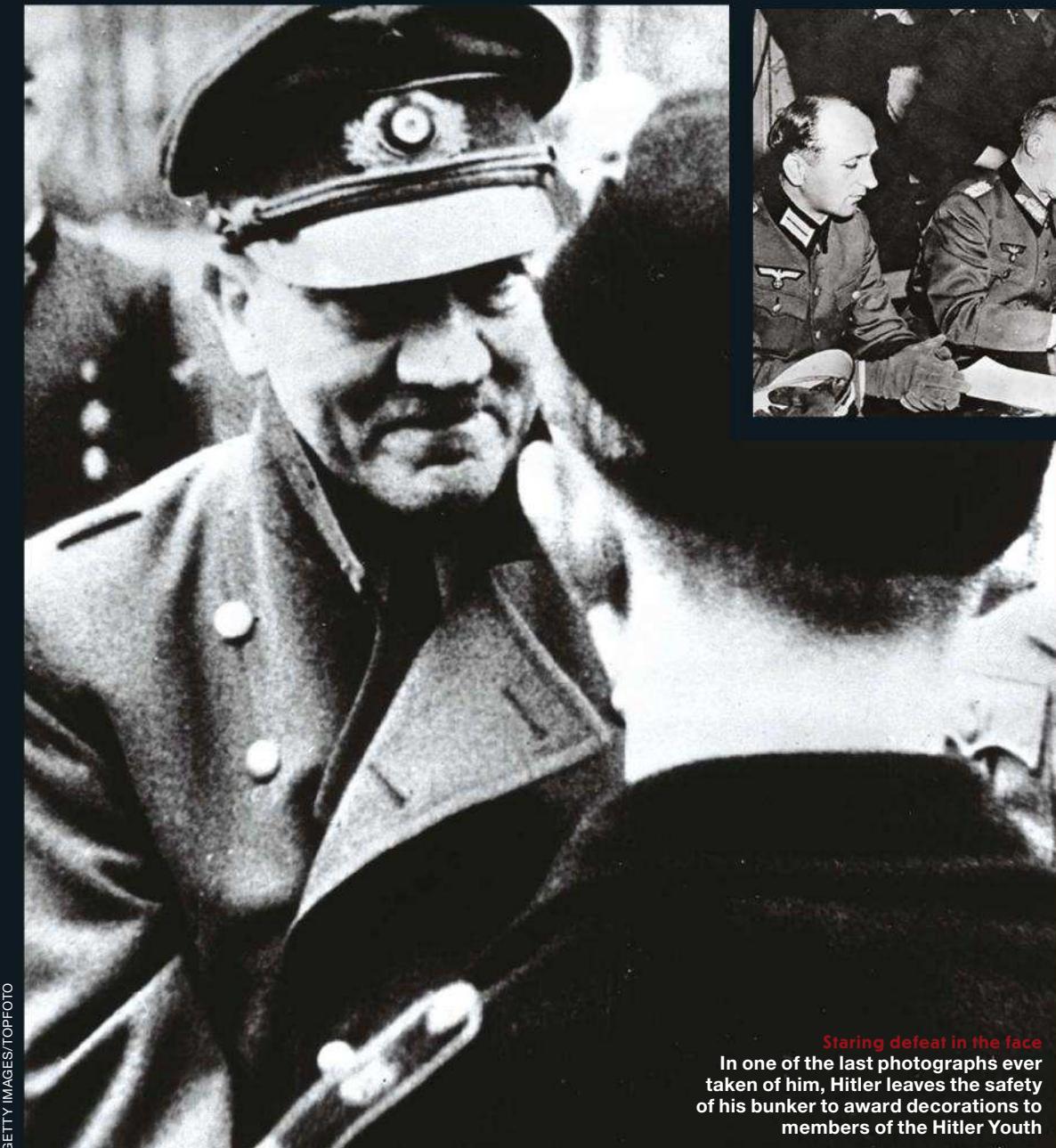
Hitler's hold among the power elite – in the dwindling area where his writ still ran – was sustained to the end. Partly this was a matter of his domineering personality and ruthlessly intransigent determination to fight on even if the German people should be destroyed in the process. But it was not simply personality. Confronting Hitler in an organised body, political or military, was impossible. An equivalent in Hitler's Germany to the Fascist Grand Council which had toppled Mussolini in July 1943 did not exist. There was no cabinet, senate,



AKG IMAGES

Forced to walk
Prisoners from Dachau concentration camp pass through Starnberg, southern Germany, 1945. Around 250,000 people are thought to have died on such 'death marches'

Though Germans overwhelmingly longed for the war to end, few wanted foreign occupation, least of all by the Russians



GETTY IMAGES/TOPPOTO



Surrender at last
General Jodl (centre) signs the terms of unconditional surrender in Rheim, 7 May 1945. Only when Hitler was dead could the Nazi power elite bring themselves to seek a negotiated end to hostilities

Staring defeat in the face
In one of the last photographs ever taken of him, Hitler leaves the safety of his bunker to award decorations to members of the Hitler Youth

politburo or military council that could challenge Hitler. And there was no alternative source of loyalty. Hitler's popularity had long been in steep decline. But the fragmented structures of authority, all of them dependent upon Hitler, persisted to the end.

As soon as Hitler was dead, after his suicide in the führerbunker on 30 April 1945, his chosen successor, Grand-Admiral Dönitz – until then an arch-fanatic in his unbending advocacy of the fight to the last – saw the need to bow to reality and seek a negotiated end. The whole surviving political and military apparatus immediately followed suit. This sudden reversal is the clearest demonstration of just how

much Germany's march towards complete defeat and destruction was owing not just to Hitler in person, but to the character of his rule and the mentalities that had upheld his charismatic domination.

Even in late April, Field-Marshal Kesselring rejected moves to surrender as long as Hitler was still alive

Ultimately, the dominant elites possessed neither the collective will nor the mechanisms of power to prevent Hitler from taking Germany to total destruction. That was decisive. ■

Sir Ian Kershaw is a leading expert on Hitler and 20th-century Germany, and is emeritus professor of modern history at the University of Sheffield

DISCOVER MORE

BOOKS

- **The End: Hitler's Germany, 1944–45** by Sir Ian Kershaw (Penguin, 2012)
- **Armageddon: The Battle for Germany 1944–45** by Max Hastings (Pan, 2015)

On parade

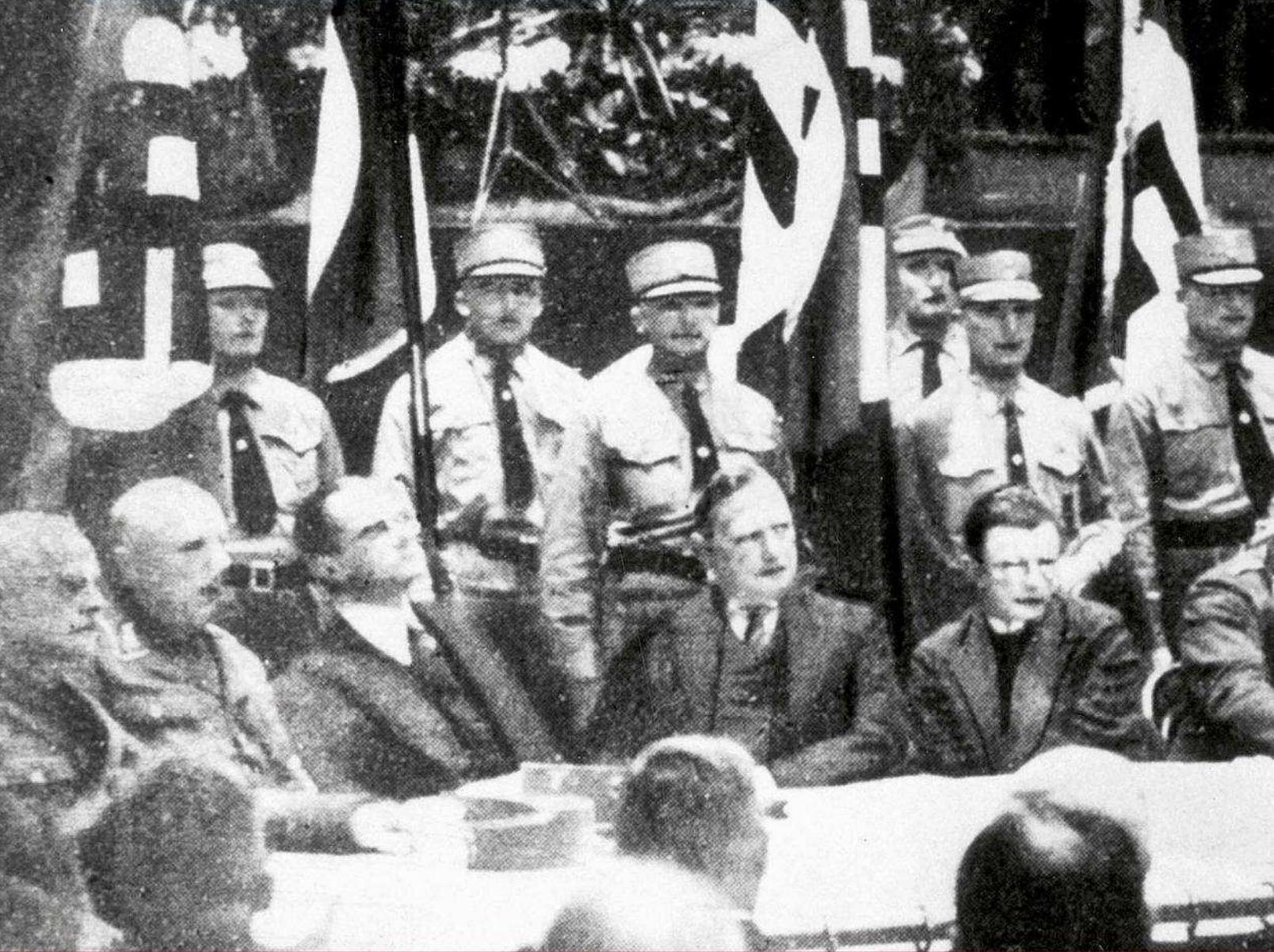
Adolf Hitler greets enthusiastic supporters at the Nuremberg Rally of 1933. Held annually at the Nazi party rally grounds in Nuremberg from 1933–38, these huge propaganda events attracted hundreds of thousands of Nazi Party members and spectators, eager to catch a glimpse of the German chancellor.





HITLER'S PHILOSOPHERS

Far from resisting Nazi ideology, many of Germany's greatest minds were enthusiastic supporters of the Third Reich, reveals **Yvonne Sherratt**





Meeting of minds

Academics meet with the Nazi authorities to sign the 'Leipzig proclamation', November 1933. The proclamation endorsed Hitler, the one-party state and withdrawal from the League of Nations. At the signing, philosopher Martin Heidegger (whose position is marked with a cross), along with around 900 other university scholars, agreed that "the National Socialist revolution is not simply the assumption of a power already present in the state: this revolution brings with it the total transformation of our German being". The declaration ends with "Heil Hitler"

In the decades since Hitler's death in a Berlin bunker, no sector of German society has remained untarnished: businessmen, scientists and doctors have all been shown to have bolstered the *führer*'s power. Yet among all these people, one group ought surely to have had both the intellectual insight and moral grit to stand up to Hitler – the philosophers. Philosophy, after all, is descended from the moral sciences.

Until 1933 there had been hundreds of Jewish academics, including philosophers, in universities across Germany. In the year that Hitler became chancellor, more than 1,600 scholars were expelled from their posts, the majority being Jews. They included some influential philosophers like Edmund Husserl and also, eventually, Karl Jaspers (whose wife was Jewish). In the wake of this purge, there is almost no evidence of any opposition from 'Aryan' philosophers – no letters, campaigns or protests. As one commentator expressed it: "Their silence was strong."

The expulsion of so many Jews left a considerable number of jobs vacant, and the standard required to obtain these was vastly reduced. The remaining philosophers quickly spotted the opportunities.

Alfred Bäumler was a crude interpreter of the cult 19th-century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. From a meagre unknown, he underwent an immediate and dramatic ascent to fame due to his commitment to National Socialism. In 1933 he gained promotion to professor of philosophy at Germany's prestigious University of Berlin and undertook the entire mental training of the Nazi party. Bäumler's colleague Ernst Krieck, a member of the National Socialist party, despised pacifist and democratic ideas. Krieck became preoccupied with the annihilation of Jewish influence and was awarded a chair at Heidelberg University, where he spied on his colleagues, worked for the security services and helped run a number of prominent Nazi institutions.

Career advancement

Many other Nazi sympathisers were soon promoted to become professors and rectors (chiefs of the universities). They included Ernst Bergmann, University of Leipzig; Max Hildebert Boehme, University of Jena; Hans Alfred Grunsky and Otto Höfler, University of Munich; Walter Schulze-Sölde, University of Innsbruck; and Hans Heyse, rector of the University of Königsberg.

These men encompass only a few of Nazi Germany's philosopher collaborators, and



ABOVE: Kurt Huber, philosopher and member of the White Rose resistance group, pictured (left) with a colleague

RIGHT: The arrest warrant for Kurt Huber. The Munich University academic was executed in 1943 after writing leaflets calling for the German people to rise against Hitler

hardly represented the cream of the nation's thinkers. Yet if you thought that those of greater talent would offer more resistance, you'd be wrong.

One of Germany's leading lights was Professor Martin Heidegger, author of the acclaimed *Being and Time*. In 1933, when asked how a man as coarse as Hitler could govern Germany, Heidegger replied, eyes shining with glee: "Culture is of no importance. Look at his marvellous hands!"

When Heidegger was granted the rectorship of Freiburg University in 1933, the programme notes that accompanied his inauguration ceremony carried the words of the 'Horst-Wessel Lied', the anthem of the National Socialist party. He declared: "The *führer* himself and he alone is the German reality, present and future, and its law... Heil Hitler."

Carl Schmitt, a brilliant legal philosopher born in 1888, joined the National Socialist party in May 1933 and began to reap the

Kurt Huber
geb. 24.10.93 Chur

Geschwister Scholl
, Weisse Rose'

3uF. g 10a 5011 43

"Fürcht vor allen Feinden"
www.foepel.de

fruits of collaboration almost immediately. He was appointed Prussian state councillor and became chair of the University of Berlin.

Ethnic honour

Schmitt used his considerable intellectual talents to help draw up an ideal of a legal system that provided the foundations for a total authoritarian regime. Then, praising Nazi leaders' calls for "healthy exorcism", Schmitt welcomed "the genuine battle of principles between the Jews' cruelty and impudence and Germans' ethnic honour". Schmitt condemned mere "emotional anti-Semitism that does not accomplish the task of driving out Jewish influence". He quoted *Mein Kampf*: "In defending myself against the Jew... I am doing the work of the Lord."

Enjoying their promotions, Hitler's philosophers went on to help establish the framework for a Nazi 'philosophy'. Like Heidegger, they worshipped the *führer*. Hans Heyse, for example, advocated total obedience: "The new German university has only one law... to serve the intentions and objectives of the *führer* of the German people."

Many, like Schmitt, also targeted the Jews. Dr Hans Alfred Grunsky and Max Wundt, professor of philosophy at the University of Tübingen, became the prolific authors of anti-Semitic theories, while Alfred Bäumler took a lead in the book burnings of mainly Jewish literature in May 1933. Indeed, throughout the thirties, it seems that not one philosopher in the German universities – whether mediocre or brilliant – did anything

Philosophers were celebrities. Their collaboration sent a powerful message of legitimacy – an endorsement of an immoral regime

Häftmerkzettel

H u b e r Dr. Kurt

Festnahme: 2. f.d.-43 Blatt
befehl vom 25.3.1943 Blatt
untergebracht — am Blatt
chungshast — Unterbringung — angeordnet Blatt
3 - Schleimhautinfiltrationen Blatt
München- Neudeck.
x - Beichen der Heil- oder Pflege.
weitere Beschwerden)
Blatt erledigt am Blatt

other than consent to Hitler.

Yet, in the early 1940s, Kurt Huber, professor of philosophy at Munich University, decided to buck that trend. A conservative nationalist, Huber was angered by the wanton loss of young German lives in the battle of Stalingrad, and the Third Reich's ever-increasing brutality. Thus he became a member of a covert resistance group named the White Rose. Huber wrote leaflets urging the German people to come to their senses and oppose Hitler. Tragically, in 1943, he was captured, tried and executed.

That it was dangerous to oppose Hitler by the 1940s was evident from Huber's fate. But, in the 1930s, before the reprisals began, why had the vast majority of philosophers collaborated?

When examining their motives it seems that some were just conforming to a norm. Others were opportunistic, perhaps even jealous of their erudite Jewish-German colleagues and eager to take any opportunities they could. Others, however, were ideological – Bäumler and Kriech, for example, were signed-up Nazis, just waiting for Hitler to come to power.

Whatever their motives, one thing is certain: the actions of these philosophers had enormous resonance. In Germany, philosophy was iconic – it held an eminence in the nation’s heritage, rather like the royal family for the British. Philosophers were celebrities. What they did, how they behaved and what ideas they promoted exerted a powerful influence upon the German imagination. So their collaboration sent a powerful message of legitimacy to society at

Hitler: The ‘philosopher führer’

Keen to bolster his intellectual credentials, the German leader would cherry-pick from the greats to legitimise his ideology



"I read and studied much": Hitler at his Berghof mountain retreat, c1936

Hitler's egotism on the subject of philosophy spread to a fantasy that he himself was a great thinker. Indeed he came to regard himself as the 'philosopher-führer'.

During the time when he was imprisoned in Landsberg am Lech in the south-west of the German state of Bavaria in 1924, Hitler claimed to have read many books. He read, he said, "everything he could get hold of", including racist ideas from thinkers like Paul de Lagarde and Houston Stewart Chamberlain, as well as canonical philosophers like "Nietzsche [and]... Marx". In his words: "I had but one pleasure: my books... I read and studied much."

It was in Landsberg, assisted by (his later deputy) Rudolf Hess, that he wrote *Mein Kampf*. In this he outlined his own atrocious ‘philosophy’. Albeit in a crude way, Hitler referred to the founding fathers of the German philosophical tradition like Immanuel Kant: “Perhaps we are ignorant of humanity’s most precious spiritual treasures... in our parts of the world, the Jews would have immediately eliminated... Kant.” He claimed to have

large, a profound endorsement of an immoral regime.

In 1945, following the fall of the Third Reich, the Allies tried to purge the German universities of Nazism. Their attempts were, however, ineffectual, and former Nazis went on to dominate a number of faculties.

Meanwhile, Carl Schmitt, who never recanted his views, and Martin Heidegger, who never apologised for his role in supporting Hitler, rose to international stardom. In fact, Heidegger would be hailed as the 20th century's greatest philosopher, while it was said that "Carl Schmitt was

read Arthur Schopenhauer, professed adoration of the 'genius' Friederich Nietzsche, and was fond of German interpretations of Charles Darwin.

Hitler also alleged a love of Friederich Schiller's philosophy. As one of his closest friends, businessman Ernst Hanfstaengl, noted: "He prefers the dramatic revolutionary Schiller to the Olympian and contemplative Goethe."

"The strong man is mightiest alone." This familiar quotation from Schiller's *William Tell* (Act I, Scene III) formed the title of chapter 8, volume 2 of *Mein Kampf* and became his motto during his later years as führer. In fact, during these years, Hitler would name-drop many of Germany's formidable intellectuals to his generals.

Hitler also found strands of anti-Semitism and appropriated ideas about race, the nation state and war – all in order to legitimise his macabre project. However, in Hanfstaengl's words, Hitler was not an actual philosopher, more a "bartender of genius".

famous, possibly the most-discussed German jurist of the 20th century".

Today, while Kurt Huber lies forgotten, Heidegger and Schmitt's ideas are venerated by some of the most prestigious institutions in the western world. **H**

Yvonne Sherratt is a senior lecturer at the University of Bristol

[DISCOVER MORE](#)

BOOK

► Hitler's Philosophers
by Yvonne Sherratt (Yale, 2014)

BOOK / THE WOMEN WHO FLEW FOR HITLER

INTERVIEW

Clare Mulley photographed in London. "Both women were proud German patriots with a strong sense of duty. However, they were committed to very different things: Hanna to the new Nazi regime, Melitta to a much older idea of Germany," she says

Photography by Fran Monks



CLARE MULLEY

"This story highlights the ludicrous contradictions of Hitler's regime"

Clare Mulley talks to Ellie Cawthorne about her book charting the extraordinary parallel lives of two female test pilots who flew for Nazi Germany

PROFILE CLARE MULLEY

Clare Mulley is a historical author and biographer. Her books include *The Spy Who Loved: The Secrets and Lives of Christine Granville* (Pan Macmillan, 2013) and *The Woman Who Saved the Children: A Biography of Eglantyne Jebb* (Oneworld, 2009)

IN CONTEXT

In the Nazi regime's male-dominated air industry, two women defied expectation and rose to prominence as test pilots. Hanna Reitsch (1912–79) and Melitta Schiller's (1903–45) highly valued and dangerous work saw them connected to the Third Reich's leading figures, and both were awarded a Nazi Germany military honour, the Iron Cross. Yet, as Clare Mulley's book reveals, the two women held opposing attitudes towards Nazism, which led them to dramatically different actions during the Second World War.

What was the symbolic significance of flight in Nazi Germany?

The German air force was abolished following the First World War, as part of the Treaty of Versailles. Planes were destroyed and mechanised flight was banned. In response, gliding became the nation's new aspirational sport. It gained a mass following; crowds of 30,000 people would come along to watch shows. Gliding was a symbol of patriotic regeneration and freedom – Germany's phoenix rising from the ashes.

In 1920, Hitler flew for the first time. Crammed in between the gas canisters of an open biplane, he didn't enjoy the experience. It was terrible weather and he got airsick. However, he instantly recognised the huge potential of flight. With its connotations of freedom and power, flying wasn't just about sport or commerce for Hitler: it was a political machine. In 1932, he became the first leader to undertake an airborne election campaign and did so with huge theatrical panache. He would fly off at dusk, lights blazing in the sky. The Nazi party went on to use flight in all sorts of ways: they advertised party membership figures on the side of zeppelins and used planes to distribute propaganda leaflets all over the country.

What have you learnt about these two remarkable female pilots?

Both were naturally brilliant pilots, but had incredibly different careers. Hanna Reitsch was the first woman to fly a helicopter and became one of very few women to fly the jet-rocket-powered Messerschmitt 163. She also tested planes with special wing tips intended to cut the steel cables underneath the zeppelins that formed the barricade

around London. She would deliberately fly into balloon cables at huge personal risk: this was incredibly courageous work. After a terrible crash in which she reportedly "wiped her nose off her face", Hanna also became an early plastic surgery patient.

Hanna is probably most famous for being one of the last people to fly into Berlin when the Red Army surrounded the city in the final days of the war. After her plane was shot at and her co-pilot slumped unconscious from blood loss, she landed near the Führerbunker. Here she begged Hitler to let her fly him to safety, but he refused.

Melitta Schiller (later von Stauffenberg) learnt to fly over the same green Silesian slopes as Hanna. She too adored the sensation and freedom of flight. But she also loved the physics behind it, and these two passions came together in the cockpit. After an engineering degree, Melitta headed up one of the main Nazi aeronautical research centres. She spent half her time at the drawing board developing pioneering changes for the Luftwaffe and the other half testing out her own designs. Her speciality was dive bombing: almost vertical dives at very high speeds. This was hugely dangerous: the blood in your body was pulled to the extremities and pilots were at high risk of blacking out. To undertake one dive bomb was extraordinary. Melitta undertook around 1,500. Other experts couldn't believe that one pilot could be doing all these tests and when they discovered it was a woman, they were absolutely astounded.

How did Hanna and Melitta feel about the regime they worked under?

They were both proud German patriots with a strong sense of duty. However, they were committed to very different things: Hanna to the new Nazi regime, Melitta to a much older idea of Germany. They took

"Hitler instantly recognised the huge potential of flight as a political machine"



Flying ace Hanna Reitsch, pictured here aged 29, keenly supported the Nazi regime

diametrically opposed positions to Nazism. Hanna was delighted to be associated with Hitler's party, which she saw as bringing back commerce, jobs and pride to her country. Even when she was made aware of what was happening in the concentration camps, she was very willing to look away and accept the Nazi cause uncritically. After the war, Hanna claimed that she was apolitical and, perhaps because of her gender, she was viewed as naïve. But in reality she made an active choice to support the regime, and despite being put through the deNazification process, she never revised her opinion. Letters Hanna wrote after the war reveal that she was deeply anti-Semitic and she wore her Iron Cross even when it was illegal to do so.

Melitta, on the other hand, was critical of the regime from the start. Her story shows how complicated survival could be inside Nazi Germany. Melitta's father had been born Jewish. In 1935, the Nuremberg laws meant that this Jewish ancestry – never relevant to Melitta before – suddenly became politically significant. Melitta's family were in increasing danger, so in order to protect them she applied for 'honorary Aryan' status, which wasn't forthcoming. By establishing herself as the leading expert on dive-bombing, Melitta made herself indispensable to the regime, giving weight to her application.

How were these women used to fuel the Nazi propaganda machine?

The media portrayed Hanna as a wonderful flying Fräulein and she became quite a celebrity. You'll see her in footage of Hitler's birthday concert in 1944. Dressed in her home-made pseudo uniform decorated with

Melitta Schiller in the cockpit (right). As well as heading up one of the main Nazi aeronautical research centres, Schiller undertook around 1,500 dive bomb tests. "These tests were hugely dangerous: pilots were at high risk of blacking out," says Clare Mulley



the Iron Cross, with her blonde hair curled, she looked extremely glamorous, and very Aryan.

Hanna was more than happy to undertake various PR stunts for the regime. In 1938, at an international motorshow intended to demonstrate the nation's return to power, she became the first person to fly a helicopter indoors. After landing it, she emerged giving the Nazi salute. She was also used to boost morale during the war, sent to reinvigorate troops on the eastern front when things were going badly.

Melitta was also asked to do publicity work, but always managed to find an excuse. Eventually she buckled under the pressure and did a speech in Stockholm. Yet even then, she never actually mentioned Hitler or the Nazi regime. Instead she spoke about her country in vague, ambiguous terms.

Did the pair cross paths? How did they feel about one another?

You might imagine that the only two Nazi female test pilots might have felt some sort of sorority, but actually they loathed one another. It was said that Melitta wouldn't even have a cup of tea with Hanna. There were certainly some very frosty meetings. Hanna was very suspicious of Melitta and her political persuasions. She even insinuated that Melitta might have been trying to sabotage the war effort. With her father having been born Jewish, Melitta was really in a vulnerable position, so this

was serious stuff. Hanna later stated there was nothing remarkable about Melitta's work and even suggested that her Iron Cross wasn't valid. So there was no love lost between the two.

Did these women believe that their gender made them pioneers?

Hanna pushed for equal pay and opportunities, and even applied directly to senior Nazi leaders about the sexism she was experiencing. Melitta, on the other hand, considered herself an exception to the rule, and even said "we female pilots are not suffragettes". With more pressing concerns, she had no interest in advancing the feminist cause. She would do her day's work as a test pilot then go home, put on a pinafore and cook her husband dinner.

What can these two women's careers tell us about the contradictory ideology of the Nazi regime?

This story does highlight the contradictions of the regime. The Nazis claimed that the only place for women was in the home: one slogan was *Kinder, Küche, Kirche* meaning 'Children, Kitchen, Church'. They also claimed there was no role at all for Jews. Yet they gave these two women – one part-Jewish – integral roles in the war effort, and awarded them the military honour of the Iron Cross.

There are other apparent contradictions too. Hanna was not a party member, but was an avid Nazi who maintained her anti-Semitic worldview for the rest of her

"You'd imagine the only two Nazi female test pilots might have felt some sort of sorority – but they loathed one another"

life, and never condemned the policies or practices of the Nazi regime. By contrast, Melitta's war work was probably of greater value to the Nazis, yet in 1944 she was connected to the most famous German attempt on Hitler's life [led by her brothers-in-law, Claus and Berthold von Stauffenberg]. These women were both brilliant pilots, both great patriots, and both incredibly courageous in different ways, but they responded very differently to the Nazi project. Ultimately it is the contrast in their beliefs, decisions and actions that make their stories so fascinating and important. ■



The Women Who Flew for Hitler:
The True Story of Hitler's Valkyries
by Clare Mulley
(Pan Macmillan, 2018)

HITLER AT HOME

While the brutal realities of the Nazi regime were unfolding, its propagandists were busy fostering an image of Hitler as the peaceful homemaker. **Despina Stratigakos** investigates



Mountain retreat

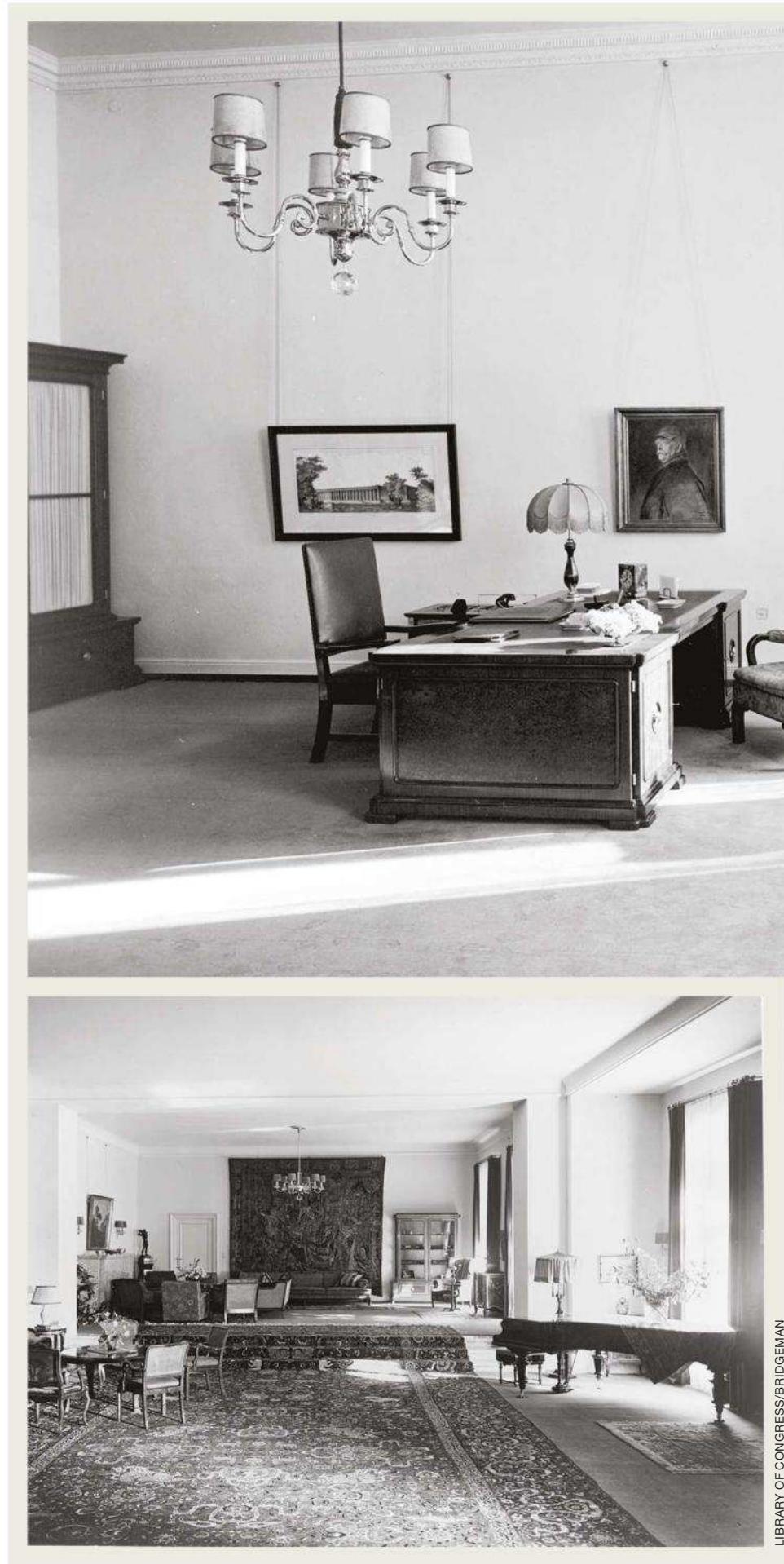
The Berghof, c1938. Hitler's alpine compound was used as the backdrop for Nazi publicity portraying him as a genial Bavarian gentleman. The building was bombed in 1945 and its ruins were demolished in 1952

On 16 March 1941, with European cities ablaze and Jews being herded into ghettos, the *New York Times Magazine* featured an illustrated story on Adolf Hitler's retreat in the Berchtesgaden Alps. Adopting a neutral tone, correspondent C Brooks Peters noted that historians of the future would do well to look at the importance of "the *führer*'s private and personal domain", where discussions about the war front were interspersed with "strolls with his three sheep dogs along majestic mountain trails".

For more than 70 years, we have ignored Peters' call to take Hitler's domestic spaces seriously. When we think of the stage sets of Hitler's political power, we are more likely to envision the Nuremberg rally grounds than his living room. Yet it was through the architecture, design and media depictions of his homes that the Nazi regime fostered a myth of the private Hitler as peaceable homebody and good neighbour. In the years leading up to the Second World War, this image was used strategically and effectively, both within Germany and abroad, to distance the dictator from his violent and cruel policies. Even after the outbreak of war, the favourable impression of the off-duty *führer* playing with dogs and children did not immediately fade.

Hitler maintained three residences during the Third Reich: the Old Chancellery in Berlin; his Munich apartment; and Haus Wachenfeld (later the Berghof), his mountain home on the Obersalzberg. All three were thoroughly renovated in the mid-1930s and facilitated the creation of a new, sophisticated persona.

It was through the architecture, design and media depictions of his homes that the Nazi regime fostered a myth of the private Hitler as peaceable homebody and good neighbour



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Office overhaul

LEFT: Hitler's study in the Old Chancellery, c1935, redecorated by interior designer Gerdy Troost

Designing the Reich

ABOVE: Making plans for Munich with Gerdy Troost and architect Leonhard Gall (partner in the Atelier Troost), 1935

Luxury touches

BOTTOM LEFT: The reception hall's ornate carpet, which Hitler boasted he had snatched away from the League of Nations

The Old Chancellery

Hitler's home in Berlin, redesigned to trumpet his grand ambitions

The Old Chancellery on Berlin's Wilhelmstrasse had been the official residence of German chancellors since 1871. After being appointed chancellor in 1933, Hitler refused to move into the building because he was sensitive to what this "shabby" (in his eyes) palace would say about him. The chancellery was in the heart of the government district and Hitler felt that these buildings, including the chancellor's residence, had a role to play in reclaiming Germany's lost diplomatic prestige following the First World War.

He therefore hired the Munich-based architect Paul Ludwig Troost to renovate

its public and private spaces. When Troost died in January 1934, the work was assumed by his widow, Gerdy, who began a new design firm, the Atelier Troost. She would henceforth become Hitler's main interior decorator.

In the renovated public spaces of the Old Chancellery, the dominant object in the main reception hall, where Hitler entertained foreign diplomats and reporters, was a vast Persian-patterned carpet. Hitler liked to tell the story that this luxurious carpet originally had been ordered by the League of Nations for its new Geneva headquarters, but

when it was completed the League was short of funds and could not pay, so he acquired it for his official residence. Hitler thus presented himself – no doubt with mocking reference to having withdrawn Germany from the League in October 1933 – as literally pulling the carpet out from under them.

Hitler claimed that he personally paid for the costly Old Chancellery renovations as a service to the nation. Gerdy Troost's invoices, however, reveal that it was German taxpayers, struggling through the Great Depression, who largely footed the bill.



Image of sophistication

Meeting Neville Chamberlain in the carefully decorated luxury nine-room apartment at 16 Prinzregentenplatz, 1938



16 Prince Regent Square

Crammed with art, his Munich home projected respectability and taste

The luxury apartment at 16 Prince Regent Square in the Bogenhausen district of Munich, occupied by Hitler in October 1929, also made a statement: it signalled the firebrand politician's social respectability to the city's better classes. The apartment spanned an entire floor of the imposing five-storey building designed in a Jugendstil style (youth style) by the Munich architect Franz Popp in 1907–08.

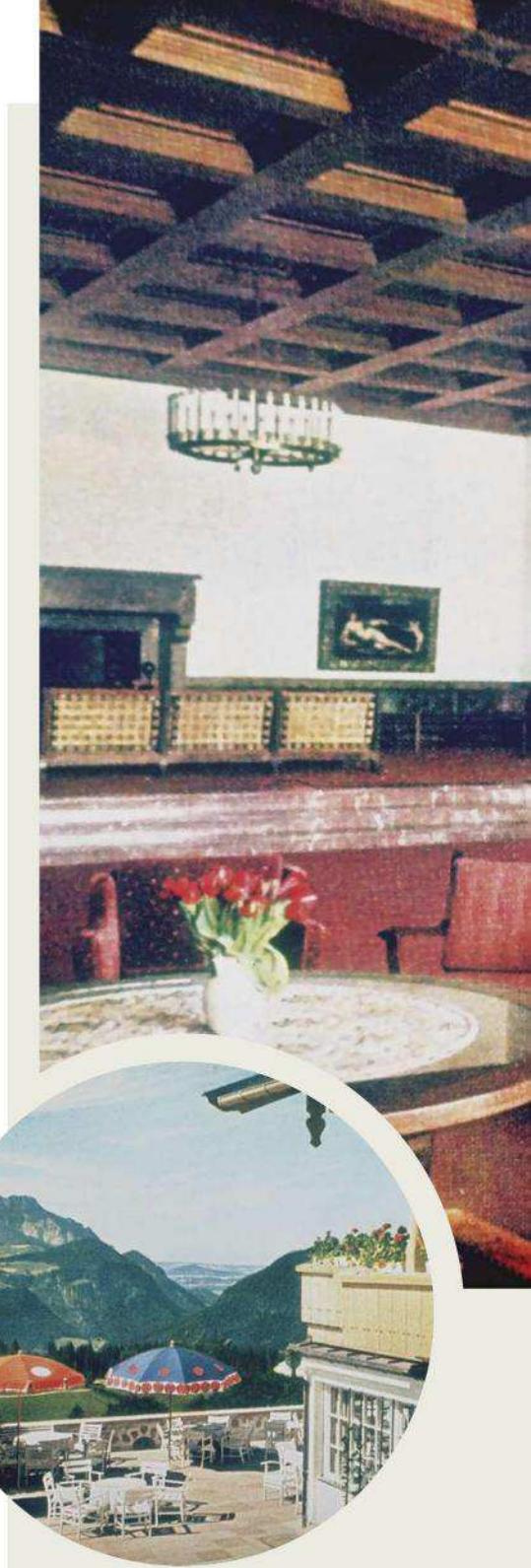
In January 1935, Hitler hired the Atelier Troost to renovate and redecorate his spacious Munich apartment at the extravagant cost of 120,000 Reichsmarks – more than 10 times the average income earned by a doctor in Germany that year. On 25 April 1935, when the apartment was nearing completion, the *Daily Telegraph* published an article about the renovations stating that the *führer* was overseeing the work and that "all the furnishings and decorations are being carried out according to Herr Hitler's own designs".

Since the source for the article was likely the Nazis' own press office, the erroneous attribution of the creative work to Hitler seems deliberate. The article reported on the *führer*'s love for German art and his passion for music, telling readers that "the decorations in his flat follow the German heroic colour scheme of blue, gold and white, made famous in Wagner's operas, and the furnishing is all of the same style". Through the reinvention of his domestic spaces, Hitler was thus portrayed as an artist and composer in his own right. While the article implied his wealth, it also gave the impression of a man so devoted to art and culture that even the colour of his pillows spoke to his idealism.

On the morning of 30 September 1938, Neville Chamberlain met privately with Hitler in his Munich apartment. The previous day and night, Hitler, Chamberlain, Benito Mussolini and the French prime minister, Édouard Daladier, had debated and eventually signed the Munich Agreement, which had sealed Czechoslovakia's dismemberment. Chamberlain went to see Hitler privately to ask him to sign a short joint declaration that the Munich Agreement and the Anglo-German Naval Agreement signed in 1935 symbolised the desire of the two nations never again to go to war with one other.

Heinrich Hoffmann, Hitler's photographer, recorded the meeting of the two leaders. In an image released to the public (see above), we see Chamberlain, Hitler and Paul Schmid, Hitler's translator, seated in the living room. Hitler, who occupies the centre of the photograph, is framed by markers of his cultivation: rows of fine books and German and Renaissance painting and sculpture.

During their conversation, Chamberlain had asked that, if Czechoslovakia resisted Germany's annexation of parts of its territory, its women and children be spared aerial attacks, to which Hitler replied that he hated the idea of babies being killed by bombs. In the photograph, the carefully chosen objects around Hitler seemed to reinforce the reassurance that Chamberlain sought, suggesting that he was negotiating with a man who understood and shared Europe's highest cultural values.



**Berghof's Great Room
was at the centre of
Hitler's intention to
rule an empire from
the comfort of his
living room sofa**



Haus Wachenfeld: The Berghof

Selling a fantasy of off-duty domesticity at his fortified mountain home

Almost as soon as work was completed on his Munich apartment, Hitler undertook a massive expansion and renovation of Haus Wachenfeld on the Obersalzberg, the place most Germans identified as the home of their *führer*. The work began in late 1935 and was completed the following summer. What had once been a modest chalet was now transformed into the Berghof, a large and carefully guarded compound. The structural expansion was undertaken according to Hitler's proposals by the Bavarian architect Alois Degano; the interiors were completed by the Atelier Troost, also working closely with Hitler.

Images of the Berghof and its happy owner, most of them taken by Hoffmann, were widely distributed and collected during the Third Reich. The mountain served as a medium to humanise Germany's leader through his contact with animals and children. Hoffmann's camera captured the off-duty *führer* handing out treats to deer and toddlers, in the seemingly perpetual sunshine of the Alps. In such officially

produced propaganda, as well as in a host of popular merchandise depicting Hitler's mountain chalet, Germans consumed fantasies about an ideal domestic life rooted in the natural landscape. These 'homey' images captured the promised land of abundance and happiness at the end of their years of suffering, the beauty interwoven with the regime's brutal policies of war and extermination. For tens of thousands of Germans, the Obersalzberg also became a place of pilgrimage, where one might lay eyes or even hands on the nation's 'saviour'.

To the broader world, the renovated Berghof proclaimed Hitler's maturation and confidence: in its stately and carefully appointed spaces, Germany's leader greeted kings and princes, prime ministers and marshals, religious leaders, secretaries of state and ambassadors. It was where he negotiated with the powers of Europe that stood between him and his vision of a greater German Reich.

Like the renovation itself, the Great Room – the centrepiece of the Berghof – was



Domestic despot

LEFT: The lavishly furnished Great Room at the Berghof in the late 1930s. Several publications, including *Life* magazine and *Homes & Gardens*, featured articles about Hitler's mountain home

Humanising Hitler

ABOVE: Propaganda portrayed a sentimental leader playing with animals and children at the ever-sunny mountain retreat

Paradise promise

BOTTOM LEFT: A view of the terrace, 1938. Images of the leader amid such natural beauty were used to reinforce ideals of his German 'promised land'

meant to convey the 'new' Hitler, not the ex-corporal who roused rebels in beer halls or the dictator who cut down his opponents in cold blood, but rather a powerful, cultivated and, above all, trustworthy statesman.

Hitler spent more than a third of his 12 years in power at his mountain home. Even a war did not seem reason enough to sacrifice its pleasures and, after 1939, the Berghof became a military headquarters from which he conducted battles and planned strategy. Hitler, it has been said, pioneered the work-from-home movement, and the Great Room was at the centre of his intention to rule an empire from the comfort of his living room sofa. ■

Despina Stratigakos is an architectural historian and professor at the University at Buffalo, State University of New York, and the author of *Hitler at Home* (Yale University Press, 2017)



“I had an almost apocalyptic vision that I was never able to forget. It seemed as if the Earth’s surface were spreading out in front of me, like a hemisphere that suddenly splits apart in the middle, spewing out an enormous jet of water, so powerful that it touched the sky and shook the Earth.”

Leni Riefenstahl, director of the propaganda film *Triumph of the Will*, describes hearing Hitler speak

The focus of attention

Hitler speaks and the people listen at the Brown House, Munich, c1930. “His calculations about... how to best manipulate the emotions of ordinary Germans were extremely sophisticated,” says Laurence Rees



THE DARK CHARISMA OF ADOLF HITLER

Hitler was far more than the frenzied madman of popular perception, argues **Laurence Rees**.

Here was a charismatic politician, brilliant at articulating the fears and desires of the people

Stop for a moment and imagine Adolf Hitler. Picture him in your mind. Who do you see? I imagine you see a figure not unlike the portrayal of Hitler in the 2004 film *Downfall*. A shouting, aggressive, unhinged character. Bruno Ganz, who played the *führer* in that film, shook and screamed so much that one key scene from the movie has become an internet phenomenon, with comical subtitles on a host of subjects being set to Ganz's incredible ranting.

But while it's true that in his last days Hitler was at times scarcely rational, it's not representative of the whole history. Moreover, the trouble is that this image plays into a deep desire I think most of us secretly possess. We want Hitler to have been a lunatic from start to finish. We want Hitler to be mad because it makes the monstrous crimes he committed – particularly during the Second World War – easy to explain.

It's simple, we can tell ourselves comfortably: Hitler was a madman who somehow hypnotised millions of ordinary Germans to do things against their better judgment. Well, he wasn't a madman, and he hypnotised no one.

Hitler became chancellor of Germany in January 1933 by democratic means. A large number of the German elite – sharp, clever people – decided to back him. Why would they support a lunatic? And the way Hitler conducted himself between 1930 and 1933 demonstrated that he was an astute – but wholly unscrupulous – politician. His calculations about where power really lay in Germany and how to best manipulate the emotions of ordinary Germans were extremely sophisticated.

Democratic gains

In addition, Hitler generated enormous – and genuine – support. His views very often matched those of huge numbers of the German population. That's something incomprehensible if we take at face value the portrayal of Hitler as a screaming nightmare.

I've been making documentary films and writing books about the Nazis and the Second World War for over 25 years now and have met hundreds of people who lived through this period – including many who dealt personally with Adolf Hitler. And the picture they paint of the *führer* is a much more complex and nuanced one than the dribbling lunatic of *Downfall*. In particular, many talk of the incredible 'charisma' that they felt Hitler possessed.

Fridolin von Spaun, for example, met Hitler at a dinner for Nazi supporters in the early 1930s. As Spaun saw Hitler staring at him he felt as if Hitler's eyes looked directly into his innermost thoughts. And when Hitler held on to the back of von Spaun's chair, Spaun felt "a trembling from his fingers penetrating me. I actually felt it. But not a nervous trembling. Rather I felt: this man, this body, is only the tool for implementing a big, all-powerful will here on Earth. That's a miracle in my view." As for Emil Klein, who heard Hitler speak at a beer hall in Munich in the 1920s, he believes that Hitler "gave off such a charisma that people believed whatever he said".

What we learn from eyewitnesses like von Spaun and Klein is that charisma is first and foremost about making a connection between people. No one can be charismatic alone on a desert island. Charisma is formed

in a relationship. As Sir Nevile Henderson, British ambassador to Berlin in the 1930s, wrote, Hitler "owed his success in the struggle for power to the fact that he was the reflection of their [ie his supporters'] subconscious mind, and his ability to express in words what that subconscious mind felt that it wanted".

It's a view confirmed by Konrad Heiden, who heard Hitler speak many times in the 1920s: "His speeches are daydreams of this mass soul... The speeches begin always with deep pessimism and end in overjoyed redemption, a triumphant happy ending; often they can be refuted by reason, but they follow the far mightier logic of the subconscious, which no refutation can touch... Hitler has given speech to the speechless terror of the modern mass...."

People like von Spaun and Klein were predisposed to find Hitler charismatic because they already believed in large amounts of the policies that Hitler advocated. So did Albert Speer, who first attended a Hitler meeting in the early 1930s: "I was carried away on the wave of the enthusiasm which, one could almost feel this physically, bore the speaker along from sentence to sentence... Finally, Hitler no longer seemed to be speaking to convince; rather, he seemed to feel that he was expressing what the audience, by now transformed into a single mass, expected of him."

But if you didn't believe in the policies Hitler proselytised then he exercised no charismatic power at all. Josef Felder, for instance, was appalled when he listened to Hitler's outpouring of hatred against the Jews: "When I left that meeting, we would get together and talk in groups. And I said to my friend, 'After that speech, my impression is, that this man, Hitler will hopefully never come to political power'. We were agreed on

“ I had never seen the man before, and there I sat, an unknown among unknowns. I saw this man shortly before midnight, after he had spoken for three hours, drenched in perspiration, radiant. My neighbour said he thought he saw a halo around his head, and I experienced something which transcended the commonplace. ”

Julius Streicher, publisher of the anti-Semitic magazine *Der Stürmer*, who heard Hitler speak in the early 1920s. He was executed for war crimes in 1946

that then." And Herbert Richter, a veteran of the First World War, came across Hitler in a café in Munich and "immediately disliked him" because of his "scratchy voice" and his tendency to "shout" out "really, really simple" political ideas. Richter also thought Hitler's appearance "rather comical, with his funny little moustache" and that he was "creepy" and "wasn't quite normal".

However, if Hitler did make a connection with his audience, then he built on that bond in a number of other ways to consolidate this charismatic link. Crucially, Hitler was always certain in his judgements. He never expressed doubt about anything to his audience. He knew the problems Germany faced and he said he knew the solutions. In addition he presented himself as a heroic figure – a simple, brave soldier from the First World War – who wanted his supporters to have 'faith' in him. As a result, some Nazi supporters even drew blasphemous comparisons between Hitler and Jesus – both had been 30 when they started 'preaching' and both sought the 'salvation' of their people.

Going nowhere

But in 1928, nine years after Hitler first became involved with the German Workers' party – subsequently the National Socialist German Workers' party, or Nazis for short – and seven years after he became party leader, it seemed as if the Nazi party was going nowhere in German politics. In the 1928 election the Nazis polled just 2.6 per cent of the vote – so more than 97 per cent of the German electorate rejected any charismatic power Hitler may have possessed. It was clear that unless Hitler could make a connection with the mass of Germans, then he could not succeed.

It took the Wall Street Crash and the dire economic crisis of the early 1930s to make millions of Germans responsive to Hitler's appeal. Suddenly, to people like student Jutta Ruediger, Hitler's call for a national resurgence made him seem like "the bringer of salvation". So much so that by 1932 the Nazis were suddenly the biggest political party in Germany. But then Hitler and the Nazis seemed to hit a brick wall – in the shape of President Hindenburg. State Secretary Otto Meissner reported that Hindenburg said to Hitler on 13 August 1932: "He [ie Hindenburg] could not justify before God, before his conscience or before the Fatherland, the transfer of the whole authority of



The great orator

On the day of the Reichstag elections of 1930, Hitler speaks to a Nazi party rally backed by a military band

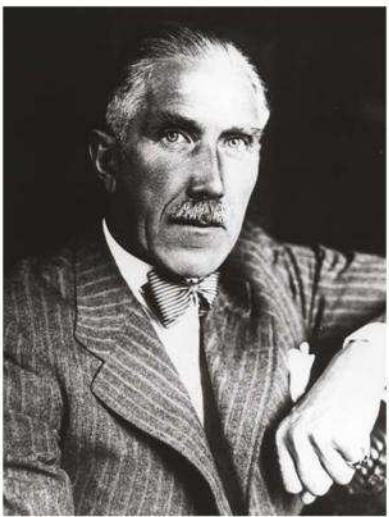
“ I was often together with Stresemann, the foreign minister at the time. A liberal, a right-wing liberal. I remember very well. It was Whitsun 1929. One evening Stresemann started talking about Hitler and said, ‘He is the most dangerous man in Germany. He possesses a devilish rhetoric. He has an instinct for mass psychology like no one else. When I retire, I will travel through Germany and get rid of this man.’ There were also a few men from the foreign office there. We didn’t understand Stresemann. We said, ‘This little party? Let the guy shout.’ ”

Theodor Eschenburg, German writer. Stresemann died in October 1929, just days before the Wall Street Crash



Pursuing power

BELOW: Hitler became chancellor under President Paul von Hindenburg (pictured left) in 1933
RIGHT: Franz von Papen, a former chancellor himself, believed that the Nazi leader could be controlled if made chancellor



government to a single party, especially to a party that was biased against people who had different views from their own."

In this crucial period between Hindenburg's rejection of Hitler's bid for the chancellorship of Germany, and his final appointment as chancellor in January 1933, two different perceptions of Hitler's charisma came together – and in the process revealed a very different side to Hitler the politician than the slavering incompetent of *Downfall*. Hitler, during these months, had never been more impressive to devoted followers like Joseph Goebbels. On 13 August 1932, Hitler discussed the consequences of Hindenburg's rejection with his Nazi colleagues. "Hitler holds his nerve," recorded Goebbels in his diary. "He stands above the machinations. So I love him." Hitler exuded confidence that all would come right, saying in December 1932 that he still intended to wait until he was offered the chancellorship. He promised, "that day will come – it is probably nearer than we think". Success depended on "our unity and on our unshakable faith in victory; it depends on our leadership".

Mystical messiah

But while Hitler's followers continued to bask in his magnetism, the chancellor of Germany, Franz von Papen, found it hard to see what all the fuss was about. Von Papen recognised in a statement he made in Munich in October 1932 that Hitler was not like a "normal" politician, and the Nazi movement not a "normal" political party. He referred to the Nazi party as "a political religion" whose followers professed a "mystical messiah faith" in Hitler. But while von Papen acknowledged that millions of Germans now recognised Hitler as a "mystical messiah", he himself was immune to Hitler's charisma. When he first met Hitler, in the summer of 1932, he found him "curiously unimpressive". Hitler was not from the "officer" class, and seemed to von Papen to be the "complete petit bourgeois" with his "little moustache and curious hair style". Equally dismissive was President Hindenburg, who referred to Hitler as a "Bohemian corporal".

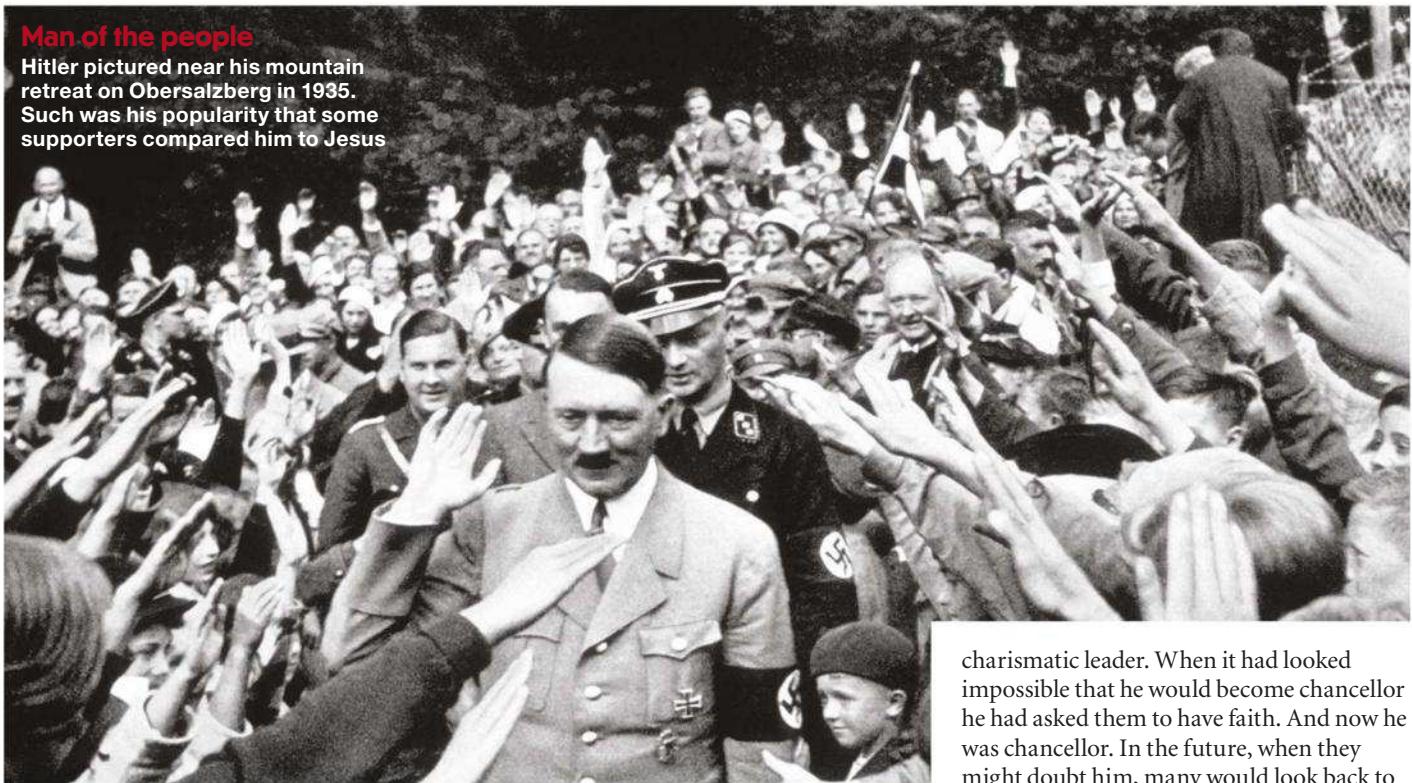
“He showed a way, the only way left to all ruined peoples in history, that of the grim new beginning from the most profound depths through courage, faith, readiness for action, hard work, and devotion, a great, shining, common goal...”

Hans Frank, who heard Hitler speak in 1920 and later became a leading Nazi. He was executed for war crimes in 1946

Following the *führer* / Hitler's charisma

Man of the people

Hitler pictured near his mountain retreat on Obersalzberg in 1935. Such was his popularity that some supporters compared him to Jesus



Then, in the November 1932 election, the Nazis saw their share of the vote drop by 4 per cent to 33 per cent, while the Communist party increased its share by 2 million votes. It looked like support for the Nazis had peaked. But the German elite were more concerned about the dangers of communism than Nazism. Without the Nazis participating in some way in an authoritarian government that would willingly deal with communism, there would be no popular mandate for change.

President Hindenburg still found Hitler unimpressive, yet he now began to think of him as a possible chancellor. And the reasons why he started to change his mind were purely pragmatic. The most important was von Papen's offer to be vice chancellor. He offered to serve as vice chancellor to Hitler's chancellor in a cabinet in which only a minority of posts were to be given to Nazis. Then there was Hindenburg's age – he was 85 in December 1932 (and would die 18 months later). "He felt his age," said Josef Felder, who was elected as a Socialist member of the Reichstag in 1932. "And he realised that he was becoming physically weaker, very much weaker. He could barely carry his marshal's baton any more." Hindenburg's son, Oskar, also supported the idea of Hitler as chancellor and von Papen as vice chancellor, and he certainly influenced his father.

Then came Hitler's masterstroke. Almost more than anyone, he understood the importance of timing in all political decisions, and he now ordered the Nazis to commit a vast – seemingly disproportionate

“The commonest little dog I have ever seen”

Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain describes Hitler in a letter to his sister, 1938

– effort in state elections to be held in the tiny district of Lippe-Detmold on 15 January 1933. The tactic worked. When the results were announced, the Nazi vote had increased by around 20 per cent – from 33,000 to 39,000. The Nazis, it appeared, were still capable of increasing their support.

On the afternoon of Sunday 29 January 1933, Hindenburg agreed to appoint Hitler as chancellor, with von Papen as vice chancellor, and both assumed office the next day. Joseph Felder remembered that "we believed we could still control him [ie Hitler] through parliament – total lunacy".

As for Hitler supporters like Reinhard Spitz, this moment signalled the end of democracy in Germany. Something that he was pleased to see. "I have never myself been a democrat," said Spitz. "I believe a country should be ruled like a big company. That means a certain council of specialists and so on, but I didn't believe in the role of parliament. When we had such a terrible crisis, like an economic crisis, and hunger and unemployment, and in such a moment, we were longing for a new general director, like what happens in a big company. You find a man, and he has to bring the whole thing in order."

For Hitler's supporters, this was the strongest proof yet of his power as a

charismatic leader. When it had looked impossible that he would become chancellor he had asked them to have faith. And now he was chancellor. In the future, when they might doubt him, many would look back to this moment and remember that he had been right and they had been wrong. They trusted him now. When he asked them to have faith once again, then they would listen. As for von Papen, he would shortly discover that he had made one of the most spectacular political misjudgments in history. (After being marginalised, he resigned his post and was made ambassador to Austria.)

We learn a number of important things, I think, from the story of Hitler's appointment as chancellor of Germany in January 1933. We discover that Hitler could be an instinctive and extremely powerful politician – light years away from the broken and crazed man portrayed in *Downfall*. Above all, we can see the power of the situation to change perception. Hitler was dismissed as a peripheral figure in 1928, yet lauded by millions in 1933. What changed was not Hitler but the situation. Economic catastrophe made huge numbers of Germans seek a charismatic 'saviour'.

As we see economic events unfold in Europe today, it's scarcely possible to imagine a greater warning from history than that. ■

Laurence Rees is an acclaimed historian and documentary maker, specialising in the Second World War and the Third Reich

DISCOVER MORE

BOOK

► **Hitler's Charisma: Leading Millions Into the Abyss** by Laurence Rees (Vintage, 2014)

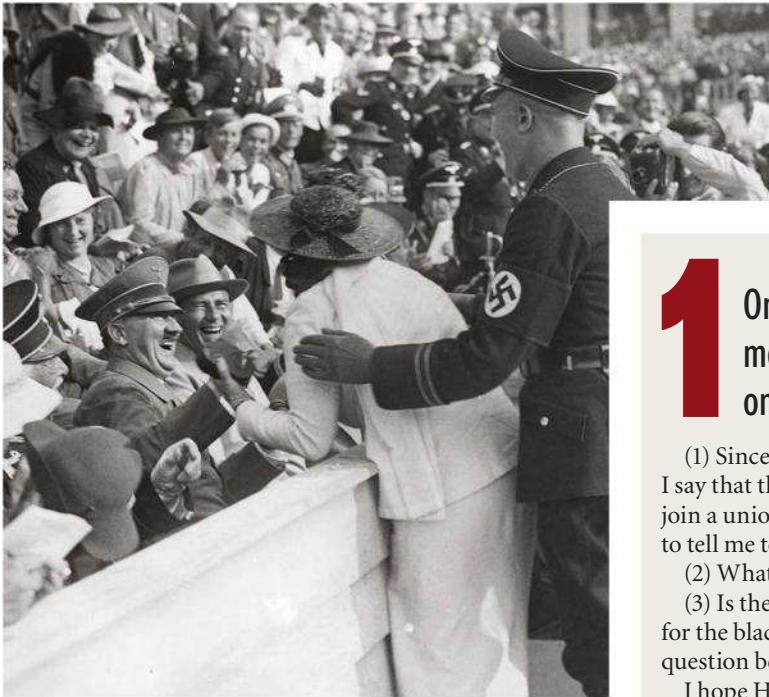
DEAR MR HITLER



Thousands of Germans wrote letters to Hitler.

Victoria Harris examines five of them and asks, what do they tell us about the Nazi leader's relationship with his people?





Hitler greets admirers in c1936 when he was still enormously popular

Between 1925 and 1945 thousands of letters arrived on Adolf Hitler's desk. The Soviet army who seized them at the end of the war thought them trivial and so they lay unread in Moscow's archives until recently discovered by historian Henrik Eberle.

Published in English for the first time in 2012 (see Discover More, page 77), the letters present a history of the Third Reich from the perspective of ordinary Germans rather than that of its leaders. They chronicle how Hitler rose from fringe politician to popular dictator – and how he squandered that popularity.

Hitler's image as the Germans' personal saviour and confidant was key to his success. It was also his greatest liability. While he encouraged expressions of adulation, promising a direct line to the Nazi leader meant that he was inundated with opinions, suggestions and questions about politics, economics and foreign policy.

Letter writers asked personal favours, criticised Nazi ideology and openly opposed incidences of repression. They came from all walks of life, and included both Germans and fans and critics from around the world. And they all expected to be answered. Many were – some even influenced policy.

The letters show that while Hitler could exercise absolute authority to silence his opponents, when it came to his subjects he was far less omnipotent.

Letter writers asked personal favours, criticised Nazi ideology and openly opposed incidences of repression

1 On 25 May 1925, a 17-year-old metalworker asks for Hitler's opinion on three very different issues

(1) Since, as He Hitler himself also says (*My Struggle [Mein Kampf]*), I say that there must be labour unions, as a metalworker I would like to join a union (just not a 'free', Liberal, or Christian one). Thus I ask you to tell me to which nationalist union I can turn in this matter.

(2) What is His stand on the alcohol question?

(3) Is the Nazi Party (if there ever is a nationalist Greater Germany) for the black–white–red colours with the swastika? How does it see this question being resolved now?

I hope He understands me, and will write me his answer as soon as he has time.

With a nationalist Hail salute

Alfred Barg

(Return postage enclosed)

Rudolf Hess replied on 4 June 1925 "on behalf of the Leader":

Very esteemed Mr Barg!

Mr Hitler gives you many thanks for your letter. Here are the answers to your questions:

On 1: Unfortunately, we do not yet have any labour unions. However, at present we are engaged in negotiations and discussions regarding the foundation of one. A great deal of money is involved, and the movement doesn't have it. In any case, don't join 'yellow' unions. Instead, stay in the Marxist ones and try to win over enough like-minded comrades so that you acquire influence in the company council elections and in time the existing unions can in this way be National Socialistically infiltrated and won for us. That is what happened in Czechoslovakia.

On 2: Mr Hitler does not drink alcohol, except perhaps a few drops on very exceptional occasions. He does not smoke at all.

On 3: As to how we stand on the black–white–red colours, as on the swastika, you probably already know that we never deny them. Besides, the main thing is the spirit that is connected with the colours and the signs. We are going to change the spirit, and the flag will follow!

With a German salute

R Hess

Barg was typical of early Nazi supporters. A teetotaller, he was highly politicised, had supported the Nazis since 1923, and bought Nazi newspapers. He subscribed to Hitler's developing mythical persona – reverently addressing him as "He". But he wanted guarantees that the Nazis' views matched his own.

Hitler's imprisonment and the stability of the Weimar Republic kept the Nazis weak, and they desperately needed the support of fanatics like Barg. Rudolf Hess, Hitler's personal secretary, guided Barg's concerns about the Nazis' views on the flag and encouraged him to 'convert' others through infiltrating unions. Hess also emphasised Hitler's purity as a teetotaller.

2 On 7 June 1932, a supporter offers advice on how Hitler can attract more women to the cause

Dear Mr Hitler!

I became a National Socialist through my three sons. I have already begun to work for the coming election campaign. Today I would like to tell you why many women do not go over to the Nazi party. [They say:] We cannot vote for Hitler because he is bringing on another period of inflation. It has taken me years to lay away some savings again, and if it should now be lost again, what then? This and similar arguments are made against me. Another woman told me that she had saved a few hundred marks for her sick son, and has to vote for the man who will try to preserve the savings of widows and orphans. I would advise you to see to it that in all electoral speeches it is said that people with small savings will not lose what they have put by when you take office.

Then our work will be easier, because what the public fears in the coming time is inflation.

With a 'Hail Hitler'

Mrs Luise Cramer

Mrs Cramer's letter is marked with the note "lie about inflation" in green pencil. As the Nazi party clearly found her concerns troubling, she received a reply from Albert Bormann from Hitler's chancellery, who wrote:

Dear Mrs Cramer!

Your letter of the 7 June was received by Mr Hitler. The lie that the Nazi party intends to produce inflation or that the latter would result from its taking power, was already systematically spread during the last election campaign by its opponents, and in fact precisely by the parties that are themselves partly to blame for the last inflation.

I am enclosing a small brochure stating our position regarding this lie.

With a German salute

Albert Bormann

Luise Cramer was not ashamed to criticise Hitler, and did not hesitate to point out the potential flaws in the Nazis' economic policies. She felt she understood women's views better than him. Just six months before taking power, the Nazis still had trouble attracting female voters, who were seemingly more concerned than men about a repeat of Germany's disastrous hyperinflation of 1923.

So concerned were the Nazis with this issue that they felt compelled to respond to Cramer. Personal interactions between Hitler's staff and his supporters were crucial to his image and the party's success.



A propaganda poster shows Hitler with children in 1934

3 In May 1932, a printer attempts to cash in on Hitler's popularity

Other correspondents worried less about the Nazis' response to Germany's economic situation, and more about how to profit economically from Hitler's prominence. Fritz Dittrich wrote to Hitler with the following business plans:

Dear Mr Hitler,

As an old, loyal and long-time supporter, I hope I may make a request to the future father of our country. I would like to put a Hitler cigarette and a Hitler cigar on the German market, and to that end I would like to politely ask Mr Hitler for exclusive permission or the exclusive right to do so. I would then apply to have these cigarettes and cigars legally protected under this name. In the expectation that Mr Hitler will graciously grant my wish I remain, awaiting a cherished reply, and with special esteem.

Fritz Dittrich, printing office owner

The reply, sent on 2 June 1932, was negative:

Dear Mr Dittrich,

Your letter of 27 May was received by Mr Hitler. However, the permission you ask for can unfortunately not be granted, because in principle the Leader does not wish his name to be used in commercial propaganda. I regret that I cannot give you a more positive reply.

With a German salute!

Albert Bormann

In a further letter dated 10 June 1932, Dittrich said that he was "very sorry" that "Mr Hitler has refused" his request, and mentioned that in England "Prince of Wales" and "Lord so-and-so" were very successful brands of cigarettes. He continued that, "Despite this great disappointment, nothing will prevent me from continuing to be an avid supporter of our Mr Hitler who is respected everywhere..."

Even Hitler's most ardent admirers felt they had an opportunity to manipulate his success to their own advantage. They viewed Hitler's popularity and their own success – and indeed also Germany's – as being connected. Hitler was not unapproachable; nor were writers like Dittrich nervous about writing again when they received an answer they did not like. Dittrich and Bormann's correspondence also shows that, while Hitler strove to be a public persona, it took considerable effort to control his image. Individual citizens did not always appreciate the Nazis' aversion to capitalist marketing, so bombarded were they by similar Nazi propaganda.

Following the *führer* / Letters to Hitler

Children celebrate
Hitler's birthday
with a piece of
cake, Berlin 1937



GETTY IMAGES



By 1939, Hitler was receiving virtually no personal birthday greetings, as Germans realised that Hitler did not care about their concerns

4 In spring 1934, a supporter with Jewish ancestry pleads with Hitler to let him work for the Nazi party

Hitler's popularity was at its height. Even Berlin artist Ernst Jaenicke, who was denied an opportunity to work for the Nazi party because of his Jewish ancestry, adored Hitler:

Our great beloved Leader Adolf Hitler!
I ask you now for advice. Must I give up everything? We are also people and perhaps better than some others. Must I leave the Nazi Party, etc.? I can't see why. But in spite of all, my sincere belief in our German Fatherland, in the National Socialist idea, and above all in you, great Leader, that belief cannot be taken away from me.

And so, great beloved Leader, Mr Reich Chancellor Adolf Hitler! Please help us, too. For this is God's work, and we believe in the one whom he has sent to us.

Hail Hitler!

Rudolf Willi Ernst Jaenicke

Oh, if only I could speak to you personally

Hitler's private office replied on 5 April 1934:

Dear Mr Jaenicke!

Your letter to the Leader of the 23 March was received here. I regret to tell you that this office can do nothing about your case. I therefore recommend that you approach your local group, which may be able to help you in some way.

With a German salute!

Albert Bormann

Jaenicke's letter reveals Jewish citizens' complete integration into German society, with many unaware of their Jewish heritage. Anti-Semitic discrimination came as a huge surprise, despite its central place in Nazi ideology. Supporters clearly ignored policies they did not like. They were also confident that, despite his dictatorial status, Hitler would listen to their pleas, even if they were Jewish. On one level they were right – Bormann still felt compelled to reply to Jaenicke.

5

In April 1939, a factory worker wishes Hitler happy birthday – but he is one of a dwindling number

Germans did not want to go to war. When it became clear that Hitler did, his popularity plummeted. Hitler received thousands of birthday letters each year. But on his 50th birthday in April 1939, such letters were mainly formulaic expressions of loyalty from organisations, including this one from a stocking factory in the Ore Mountains.

My Leader!

On behalf of the ARWA Factory Association I take the liberty of sending you, my Leader, my sincerest wishes for happiness and success.

Unalterable loyalty and tireless work in your spirit, my Leader, are pledged you by the ARWA Factory Association.

At my request, a member of our workforce, Hermann Haase, has carved your parent's home in Leonding in the Erzgebirge style.

The ARWA Factory Association hopes thereby to give you pleasure, my Leader, and asks you to accept the birthday gift.

Hail, my Leader!

ARWA Factory Association

Factory Manager Wieland

The letter of thanks was addressed to the wood-carver Hermann Haase and the ARWA Factory Association:

Please accept my sincere thanks for the pleasure that you have given me with your thoughtfulness on the occasion of my birthday.

Adolf Hitler

By 1939, Hitler was receiving virtually no personal birthday greetings. Perhaps that is why he personally replied to Haase, who had made him a birthday gift. Faced with increasing repression, Germans realised that Hitler did not care about their concerns. His carefully cultivated image had been revealed to be a myth.

Victoria Harris is a former fellow in history at King's College, Cambridge

DISCOVER MORE

BOOK

► **Letters to Hitler** edited by Henrik Eberle and Victoria Harris (translated into English by Steven Rendall) (Polity Press, 2012)

NAZI

The Nazis and the occult

Witches, werewolves and vampires in Third Reich ideology

Hitler's plan for world domination

What lay behind Hitler's determination to conquer Europe?

Voices of the Holocaust

The tragic stories of death camp survivors

Sewing for the Nazis

How female prisoners made clothing for their Auschwitz captors

Adolf's assassin

Henning von Tresckow's five attempts to kill the führer

The long shadow of Hitler

Why the Nazi leader continues to fascinate

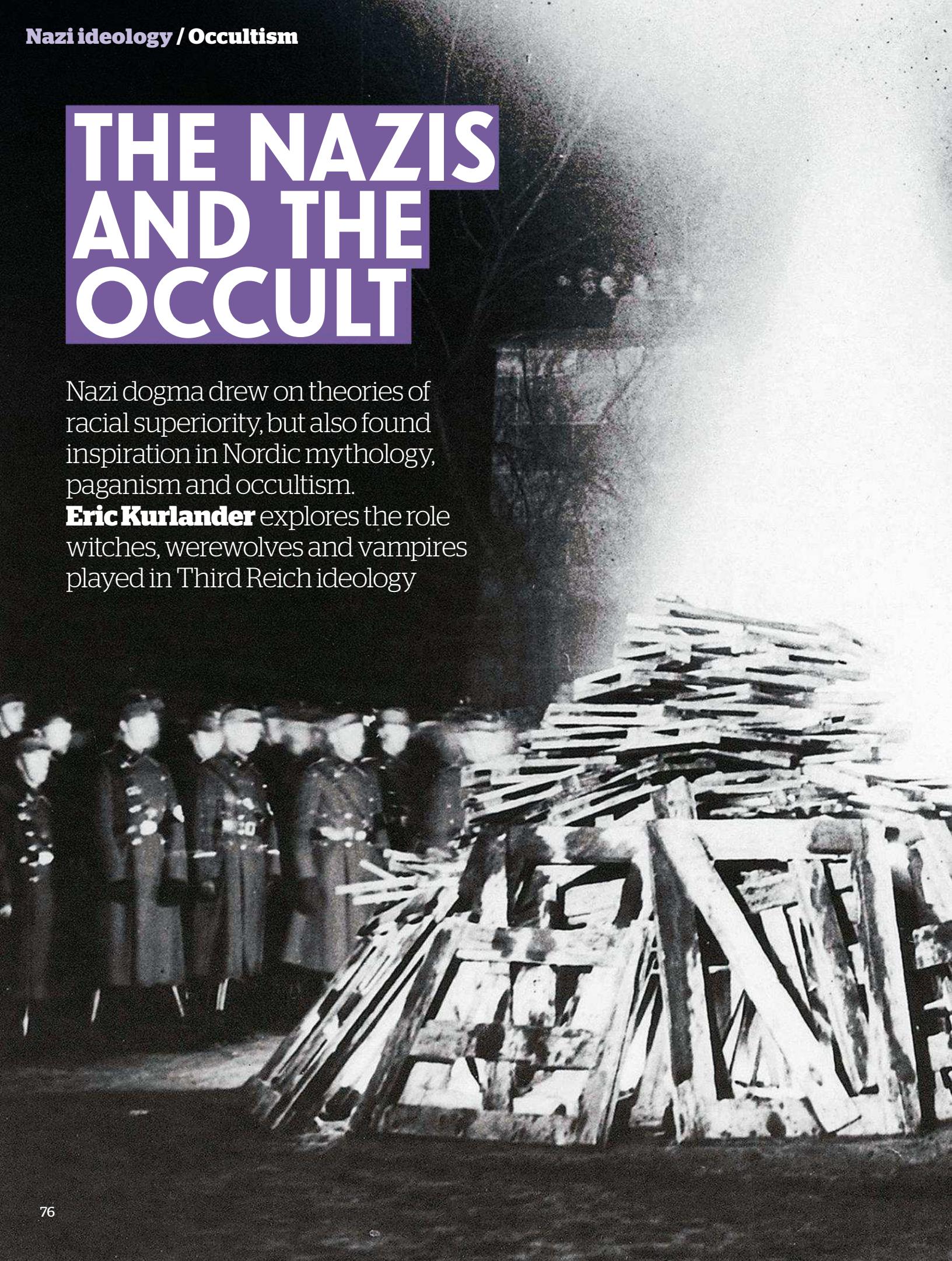
IDEOLOGY

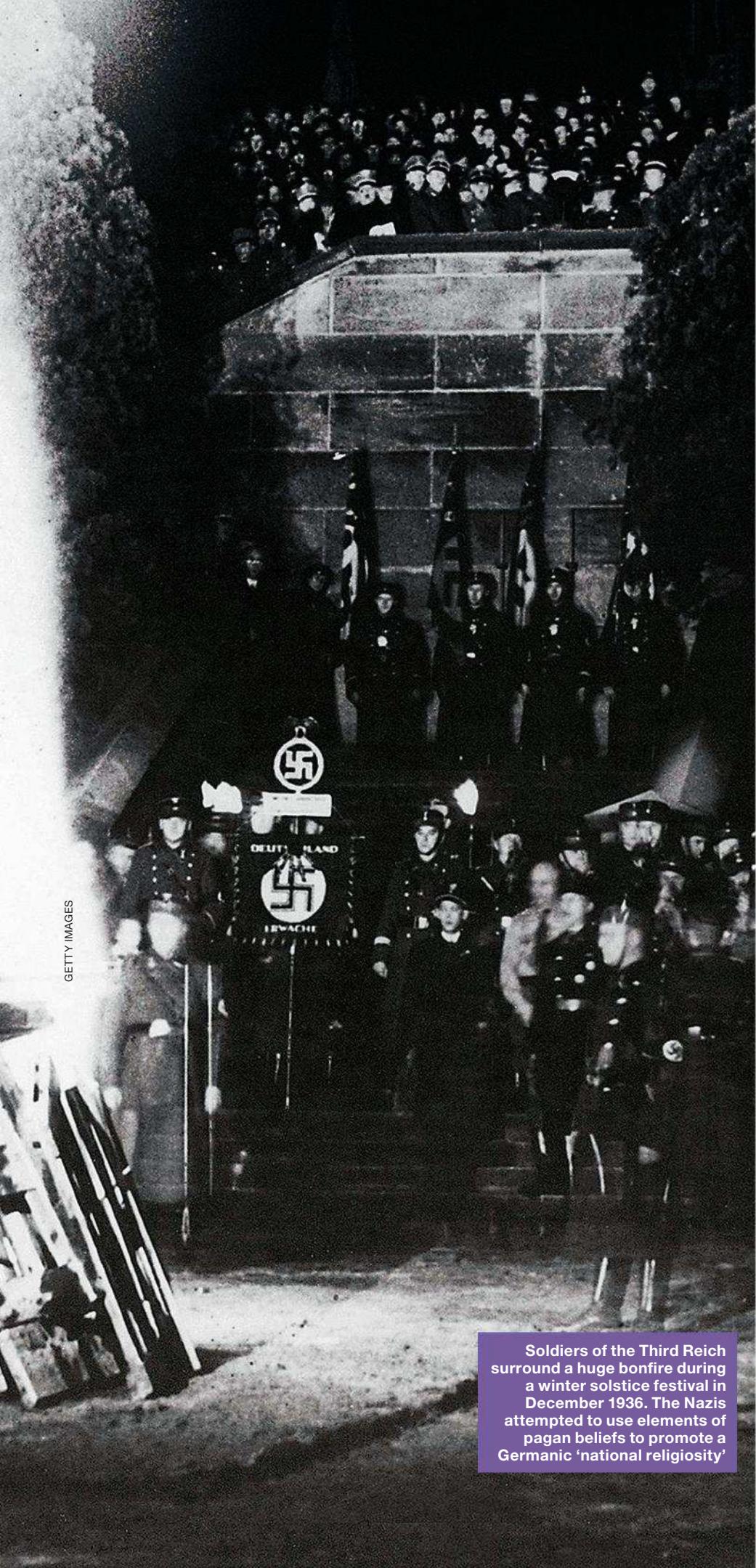


THE NAZIS AND THE OCCULT

Nazi dogma drew on theories of racial superiority, but also found inspiration in Nordic mythology, paganism and occultism.

Eric Kurlander explores the role witches, werewolves and vampires played in Third Reich ideology





GETTY IMAGES

Soldiers of the Third Reich surround a huge bonfire during a winter solstice festival in December 1936. The Nazis attempted to use elements of pagan beliefs to promote a Germanic 'national religiosity'

In Marvel's blockbuster movie *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011), a Nazi officer searches for an ancient relic, the Tesseract, reputed to bestow on its owner infinite power.

In fact *Captain America* contains many elements of Nazi supernaturalism: occult forces, mad scientists, fantastical weapons, a superhuman master race, and magical relics granting the Third Reich unlimited power.

Steven Spielberg's *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), too, saw Indiana Jones racing to find the ancient Jewish Ark of the Covenant, again sought by Nazis planning to harness its reputed occult power. And Hellboy, a comic book superhero who starred in two big-screen adaptations (2004 and 2008) and computer games, was a demon summoned to Earth by Nazi occultists. These are just three examples. Popular culture has long been awash with images of the Nazi supernatural, from Second World War-era comic books to 21st-century video games, and from classic sci-fi films to contemporary horror movies. For nearly as long, many academics have dismissed such ideas as at best highly exaggerated, at worst completely fictional.

Yet there is plenty of evidence of an important link between Nazism and the supernatural. No mass political movement drew as consciously or consistently on the 'supernatural imaginary': on occultism and fringe science; on pagan, New Age and eastern religions; on folklore and mythology. The Nazis exploited these ideas and practices to attract a generation of German men and women seeking new forms of spirituality and novel explanations of the world – explanations that sat somewhere between scientific verifiability and traditional religion.

Once in power, no mass party made such an effort to police or parse, much less appropriate and institutionalise, such doctrines. They were applied to the realm of science and religion, to culture and social policy, to the drive towards war, to empire and to ethnic cleansing. One cannot understand the history of the Third Reich without understanding this relationship between Nazism and the supernatural.

The Nazis applied occultism to science, to religion and to culture – and to the drive towards war and ethnic cleansing

>



PAGANISM

Subverting ancient mythology

In 22 December 1920, the Nazi Party sponsored a winter solstice festival. The festival was important, according to the *Völkischer Beobachter* (People's Observer), the main Nazi newspaper, because it would help restore racial and spiritual unity in the wake of the war and the leftwing revolutions of 1918–19.

The renaissance in Aryan civilisation symbolised by the solstice, declared one speaker, was prophesied by Nordic mythology and religion in ancient times. The "National Socialist solstice," according to Anton Drexler, co-founder of the Nazi Party, was a "visible sign of the return to German thought". Another speaker talked of Baldur, the Nordic sun-god, pagan deities and heroes, and the great history of Nordic mythological hero Siegfried ("his birth in us – that is our solstice prayer").

The Nazis did not invent the tradition of a pagan German Christmas. The organisers were indebted to similar solstice festivals revived a decade or so earlier by Guido von List and Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels, proponents of the esoteric belief system dubbed Ariosophy. But the Nazis made good use of these pagan-esotericist traditions in their attempts to sponsor a more 'authentic' Germanic religiosity – an alternative to what they considered the destructive institutions and doctrines of Christianity.

For nearly a decade, between 1935 and

1944, Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler charged a Hexen-Sonderauftrag (Special Task Force on Witches, or Witch Division) with collecting archival material on the persecution of pagan religious practices by the medieval Catholic Church across central Europe. The division assembled nearly 30,000 documents from various local and regional archives. Its purpose, according to Himmler, was to solve the riddle of how the "dominant Aryan-Germanic religion of nature could be defeated by the decadent Jewish-Christian religion".

The SS witch researchers came to the conclusion that Nordic 'witches' were the "guarantors of German faith" and "natural healers" from the oldest Germanic sagas. By accusing so-called witches of consort-

Himmler's SS witch researchers concluded that Nordic 'witches' were "natural healers" from the oldest Germanic sagas



LEFT: Witches prepare a spell to conjure a hailstorm in a 15th-century German woodcut. Witches were Aryans who were persecuted by "the decadent Jewish-Christian religion", according to Himmler
ABOVE: Otto Rahn (right, pictured with his mother), an archaeologist whose arcane, occult-influenced ideas were seized upon by the Nazis

ing with the devil, the medieval Catholic Inquisition had criminalised the practise of German religion and justified the murder of its spiritual leaders.

Such theories were taken one step further by the archaeologist Otto Rahn, who may have inspired plotlines and characters in Spielberg's Indiana Jones films. In a 1933 book called *Crusade Against the Grail*, Rahn argued that the "cup of Christ" came from the Indian mani, the symbol for a stone fallen from heaven, brought to Europe from the Himalayas by a white dove.

Sponsored by Himmler and the SS, Rahn's second book, *Lucifer's Court* (1937), went even further. In it he speculated that the Grail lay at the centre of a medieval cult of Luciferians – literally, devil worshippers – who practised a pagan, Ur-Aryan religion drawn from Tibet and Northern India via Persia. Accused of heresy and witchcraft, these last representatives of the Indo-Aryan civilisation of Thule ('Atlantis' in western tradition) had been eradicated by the Catholic Church, though their teachings were preserved by the Knights Templar and Tibetan monks.

Rahn's theories linked Tibetan Buddhism, Hinduism and Indo-Aryan mythology with the paganism, Luciferianism and witchcraft practised across Germany in the Middle Ages, at places such as Brocken in the Harz mountains, the site of the Walpurgis Night scene in Goethe's *Faust*. This explains why many Nazis believed that Tibet was the home of an ancient Indo-Aryan people who had fled the destruction of their Ur-Aryan civilisation (Atlantis or Thule) after a series of floods. Indeed, though all of these Nordic and Indo-Aryan religious traditions "seemed to be going in different directions", as the historian George Williamson wrote, they all served "the purpose of forging a national religiosity that the Nazi regime wanted".

OCCULTISM

Strange 'science'

Not all Nazis were enthusiastic about occultism and paganism. In May 1941, Martin Bormann, soon to become Hitler's deputy, sent a memorandum to Nazi officials. "Confessional and occult circles," Bormann wrote, "have attempted to spread confusion and insecurity amongst the people through the conscious dissemination of miracle stories, prophecies [and] astrological predictions of the future." We "have to be careful," Bormann added, "that no party members, especially in rural areas, take part in the propagation of political fortune telling, confessional belief in miracles or superstitions, or occult miracle-making."

Why, after eight years in power and two years of war, hadn't the Third Reich moved more aggressively to curb occultism? The answer is that the Nazis themselves embraced many occult and fringe scientific practices, with Nazi leaders sponsoring everything from astrology and parapsychology to radiesthesia (pendulum-dowsing).

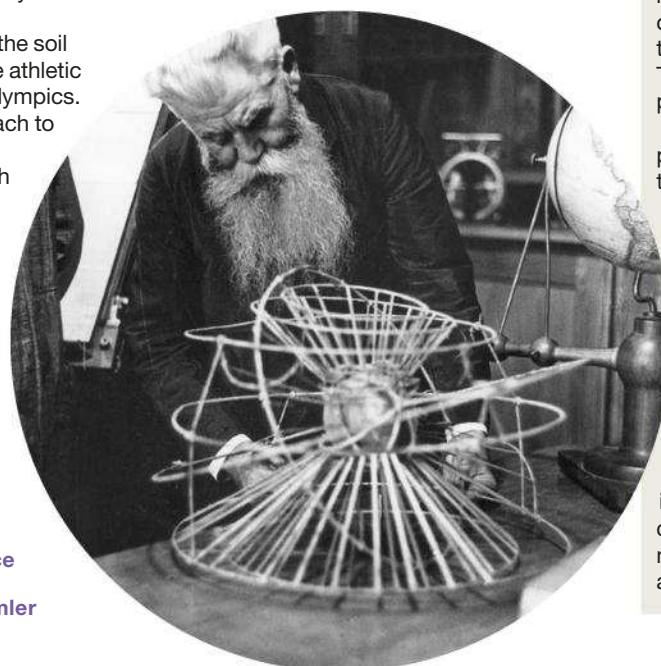
Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels hired astrologers to produce material. The parapsychologist Hans Bender's occult experiments were reported in major newspapers and sponsored by a Reich-financed institute funded by Hitler and Himmler. Hitler and Himmler's commitment to the bizarre doctrine of World Ice Theory, which claimed that celestial bodies made of ice determined the course of cosmic and human history, was more powerful still. The regime even employed occult-inspired biodynamic agriculture – based on harnessing cosmic forces in the soil and the stars – to prepare the athletic fields in Berlin for the 1936 Olympics.

During the war, this approach to decision-making and policy helped facilitate projects both fantastical and monstrous. The Third Reich appropriated folklore, occultism and fringe science to justify military aggression and territorial expansion. Elements of Indo-Aryan religion and Nordic mythology informed Nazi conceptions of geopolitics

and efforts to cultivate alliances with Asian and Middle Eastern powers.

Hitler himself took a magical approach to wartime operations. In attracting popular support and making decisions, he relied as much on intuition and faith as he did a practical assessment of the military circumstances. The propaganda ministry, SS and foreign office employed professional astrologers and diviners to produce wartime propaganda and gather military intelligence. The German Navy created a Pendulum Institute in 1942 to locate enemy battleships. And in 1943, after Mussolini was deposed and imprisoned, the SS gathered three dozen occultists and charged them with tracking him down.

These occult and fringe scientific theories were far from innocuous. It is no coincidence that the infamous SS doctor Sigmund Rascher was the son of Hanns Rascher, a proponent of natural healing and biodynamic agriculture – and one of Germany's leading Anthroposophists, who believed that humans can, through inner development, learn to access a discrete spiritual world. Rascher the younger became one of Himmler's most odious acolytes, conducting terrible human experiments at Dachau, while his father's 'biodynamic' teachings were also applied to improve German farming in occupied Poland. The Raschers epitomised the broader nexus between occult and fringe scientific thinking and Nazi racial science, which produced some of the worst crimes of the 20th century.



AKG IMAGES

Hanns Hörbiger, who proposed a bizarre World Ice Theory that attracted the attention of Hitler and Himmler

VAMPIRISM

The campaign against Jewish 'bloodsuckers'

In summer 1943, the Regional Education Office of the Nazi Party published a pamphlet with the evocative title *Der jüdische Vampyr chaotisiert die Welt* (The Jewish Vampire Brings Chaos to the World). Part of a propaganda series on "The Jew as World Parasite", it argued that the Second World War was defined by an existential conflict between Aryans and Jews, who had "propagated political and economic black magic for three millennia". "Wherever a wound is ripped open on the body of a nation," the pamphlet continued, "the Jewish demon always feeds in the sick place," like a "powerful parasite from dreams".

This propaganda was not empty rhetoric. Many Nazi leaders appear to have viewed the Jews as omnipotent, supernatural monsters. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler made multiple references to Jews as "vampires", "bloodsuckers" and "spongers", stating that "wherever he appears, the host people dies out after a shorter or longer period". The Jew "never cultivates the soil", Hitler added, "but regards it only as a property to be exploited".

His blood-sucking tyranny becomes so great that excesses against him occur." After the "death of his victim", Hitler explained, "the vampire sooner or later dies, too," which is why the Jews, he said, would always search for new, healthy societies on which they could feed. For Hitler, killing just a few Jewish 'vampires' was "completely irrelevant" – the "chief result was that a few other bloodsuckers... came into a job much sooner". Like an undead vampire, the Jew needed "the smell of decay, the stench of cadavers, weakness, lack of resistance, submission of the personal self, illness, degeneracy! And wherever it takes root, it continues the process of decomposition!" No wonder that Hitler remarked in December 1941 that: "he who destroys life is himself risking death. That's the secret of what is happening to the Jews. This destructive role of the Jew has in a way a providential explanation."

The Holocaust was part of a longer-term pattern of European colonial violence against the racial other, exacerbated by total war, economic scarcity and virulent anti-

Bolshevism. Yet the Third Reich's specifically genocidal plans toward the Jews were more radical than those of other European colonisers because the Nazis drew not merely on Darwin, Kipling or the Bible, but on a supernatural imaginary they shared with Lanz von Liebenfels and other racist occultists.

Only by associating Jews with vampiric, superhuman opponents intent on destroying the Aryan race could the Nazis lay the conceptual groundwork for murdering so many harmless civilians in so monstrous a fashion.



LYCANTHROPY

Werewolves of the Wehrmacht

Just a few years after the end of the Second World War, Oxford historian Robert Eisler gave a lecture to the Royal Society of Medicine titled *Man into Wolf: An Anthropological Interpretation of Sadism, Masochism and Lycanthropy*. A belief in lycanthropy, Eisler began, was prevalent across ancient and medieval Germany. This belief in the ability to transform into an animal, Eisler continued, had been resuscitated in the Third Reich, which employed the folkloric concept of the werewolf ubiquitously.

Nothing could be more thrilling, Hitler suggested, than "to see once more in the eyes of a pitiless youth the gleam of pride and independence of the beast of prey". Organised in "wolf packs", he believed, they might hunt down and murder Germany's enemies in the dead of night. Hitler urged his soldiers to "[fling] themselves upon the enemy in packs" like wolves. His headquarters in Ukraine was known as the "Werewolf" compound, and his better-known headquarters in East Prussia as the Wolfsschanze (Wolf's Lair).

The research institutes of both Himmler and influential Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg produced reports suggesting that the "incarnation of the werewolf runs through Aryan and German fairy tales and naming conventions", and was one of the Ur-Germanic characteristics of German racial spirit. There was no connection between the "werewolf and slavic vampire", wrote the Nazi folklorist Lutz Mackensen. Vampires (linked in Nazi minds with Jews) were evil and racially degenerate. Werewolves, on the other hand, belonged to

that rare group of heroes who could change into animals and could never "serve the devil". As the "dogs of God", werewolves were forces for good, defending the people against evil and protecting their souls – an argument made by one of Alfred Rosenberg's subordinates in a dissertation.

In fact, the Third Reich actively sponsored the republication of Hermann Löns' 1910 novel *Der Wehrwolf*, about a band of partisans defending Germans against foreign incursion during the Thirty Years' War. In choosing the name for their own new partisans, Hitler, Himmler and Goebbels made a small though important point with nomenclature. Löns' *Wehrwolf* and the interwar 'Wehrwolf' movement employed the term *Wehr*, a play on the German word for 'defence'. Hitler and Himmler chose instead the more overtly supernatural derivation of the word, *Werwolf*, for the name of their own paramilitary, a troop of volunteers recruited to operate behind enemy lines.

As far as Hitler, Himmler, and Goebbels were concerned, 'Operation Werewolf' constituted a core element in their vision of total victory or apocalypse. It was timed, after all, with the impending Allied invasion of the Reich proper and the rise of local militia movements in the east, where Communist partisans carried out guerrilla warfare, assassinations and sabotage against German occupiers. Even in the territory the Allies believed they had conquered, Himmler announced in October 1944, the Germans would "constantly spring to life again, and, like werewolves, death-defying volunteers will damage and destroy the enemy from the rear".

ABOVE: Nazi German and Fascist Italian ministers meet in 1942 at Hitler's headquarters in East Prussia, which was called the Wolfsschanze ('Wolf's Lair')
BELOW: Badge of the 'Wehrwolf', a German far-right paramilitary group of the interwar period



Hitler urged his soldiers to "[fling] themselves upon the enemy in packs" like wolves

NAZI TWILIGHT

Ragnarok of the Reich

The final opera in the Ring Cycle by Richard Wagner, Hitler's favourite composer, is called *Götterdämmerung* – Twilight of the Gods. The title was derived from the Old Norse myth of Ragnarok, the 'fate of the Gods', which culminates in a final, cataclysmic battle between the deities and their enemies.

Drawn from the 13th-century poetry and prose epic *Edda*, Ragnarok foretold a series of attacks by the giants from Jotunheim, the fire demons of Muspellheim and the Midgard Serpent. In this terrible melee, Odin, Thor and Baldur will be killed, the earth and sky will be destroyed and the sun will turn black. Nevertheless, as foretold by prophecy, two of Thor's sons will survive the apocalypse, Baldur will return from Hel, and the Earth and humanity will be reborn.

Götterdämmerung is different in many respects from the *Edda*, since Wagner's tetralogy was based primarily on the medieval German epic *Nibelungenlied* (Song of the Dwarves), in which the dwarves Hagen and Alberich stood in for *Edda*'s giants and fire demons. However, both accounts culminate in a final battle against implacable supernatural enemies. And both end the same way – with the Nordic gods and heroes consumed by fire in a message of redemption. This idea of existential conflagration, a series of battles that would produce either final victory

(*Endsieg*) or total defeat, became especially prominent during the last years of the war.

For most Nazis and many millions of Germans, the line between natural and supernatural, empirical and fringe science, was always porous. Once the Third Reich entered a period of total war after Stalingrad, however, twilight-inspired thinking found ever more fantastical and violent expression. Such thinking was apparent in Operation Werewolf and, more remarkably, in ethnic Germans accusing Slavic partisans of vampirism. Twilight-inspired supernatural thinking extended into armaments, producing a desperate search for hyper-destructive, increasingly fantastical miracle weapons – including anti-gravity machines, 'death rays' and massive missiles – with no basis in material or technological reality.

During the final months of the war, many Nazis and many ordinary Germans wanted to believe that death was not permanent, that fantasy was reality, that a 'magical priest' such as Hitler – or perhaps some new prophet – might rescue them from annihilation. In this way, the regime's fanciful preoccupations with miracle weapons, partisan werewolves, vampires and ritual self-immolation functioned as a form of therapy for Germans suffering material and psychological distress.

During the final months of the war, many Nazis and millions of ordinary Germans wanted to believe that death was not permanent

If twilight imagery helped Germans reconcile themselves to everyday violence, criminality and loss, it also augured the disintegration of the Third Reich and Germany's postwar rebirth. By the end of the war, the myriad stories, prophecies and conspiracy theories shared by ordinary Germans were less likely to exorcise Jews, communists or freemasons than to peddle visions of retribution and redemption. Germans' final recourse to the supernatural imaginary was no longer about political domination, ethnic cleansing or empire. It was much more the expression of hope and fear in the wake of the dissolution of the Third Reich. ■

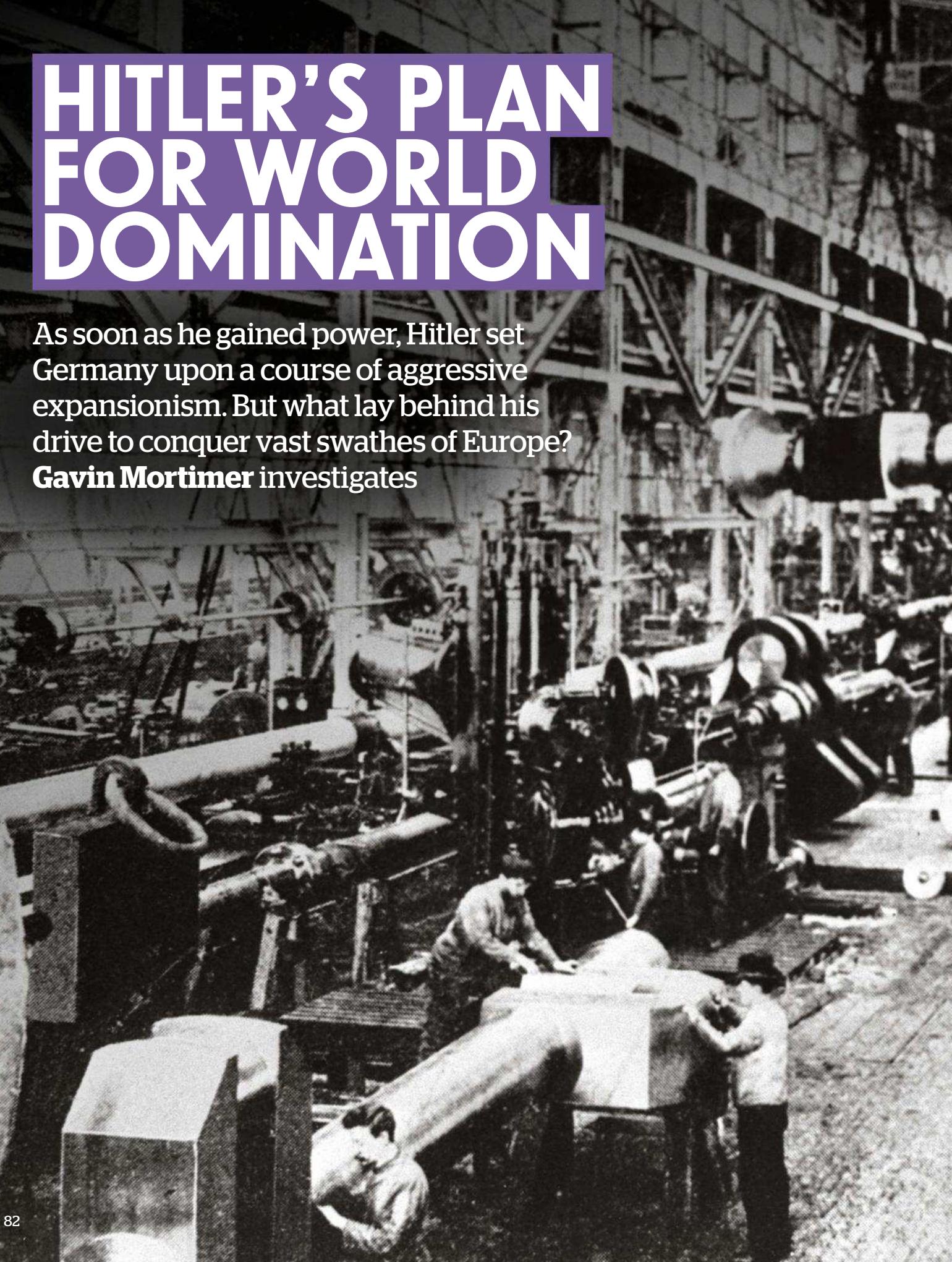
Eric Kurlander is professor of history at Stetson University, Florida, and author of *Hitler's Monsters: A Supernatural History of the Third Reich* (Yale University Press, 2018)

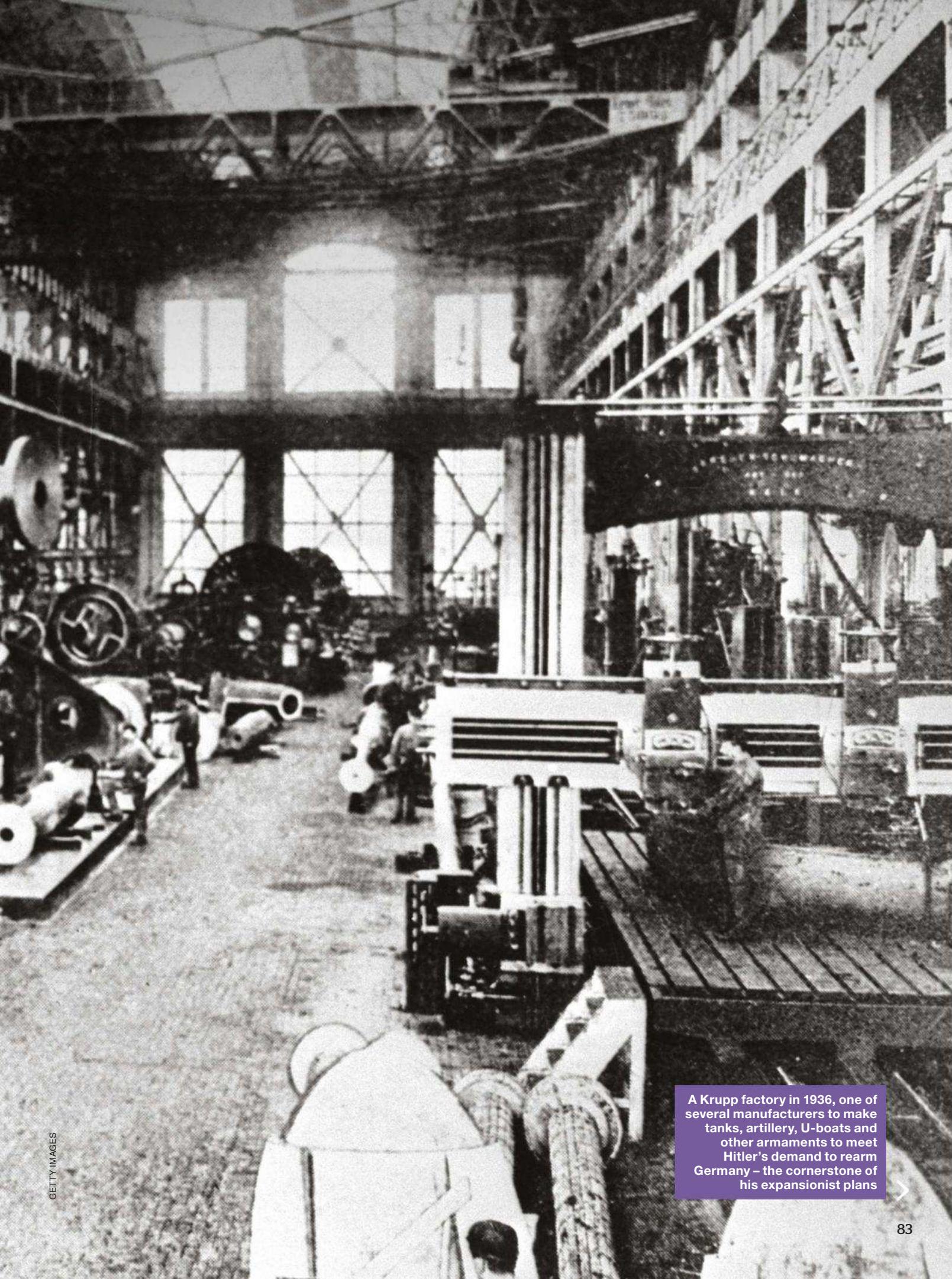
A performance of *Götterdämmerung* in Berlin, 1936. The core theme of the opera, by Hitler's favourite composer, Richard Wagner, fuelled German beliefs that total defeat in the war would be followed by rebirth



HITLER'S PLAN FOR WORLD DOMINATION

As soon as he gained power, Hitler set Germany upon a course of aggressive expansionism. But what lay behind his drive to conquer vast swathes of Europe? **Gavin Mortimer** investigates





A Krupp factory in 1936, one of several manufacturers to make tanks, artillery, U-boats and other armaments to meet Hitler's demand to rearm Germany – the cornerstone of his expansionist plans

Nazi ideology / Empire building

The new German chancellor with a cadre of his ministers, to whom he laid out his plans for *Lebensraum*: the campaign to provide ‘living space’ for a growing, superior German race



ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES



After years of clandestine production, Germany parades its burgeoning military might at the 1935 harvest festival

Within a week of being appointed chancellor, Hitler informed his ministers that “the next five years must be devoted to the rearmament of the German people”

On 5 November 1937, Adolf Hitler summoned the inner circle of the Nazi Party to the Reich Chancellery in Berlin. Among those who arrived on the chilly winter’s day were the commanders of the army, navy and air force, Reich war minister General Werner von Blomberg and foreign minister Konstantin von Neurath.

“The aim of German foreign policy,” began Hitler, “is to make secure and to preserve the racial stock and to enlarge it. It is therefore a question of space.”

That was only partially true, as his audience well knew, particularly the head of the air force, Hermann Göring. The previous year, Göring had been tasked by Hitler to

implement his four-year plan, which in effect was an economic charter for war. Six departments were to be organised to maximise Germany’s production and distribution of raw materials and agriculture, so that, in the eventuality of war, the country would be self-sufficient and immune to the blockades that had had such a devastating effect during the First World War. The concept of state-wide self-sufficiency – autarky – was good in theory, but in practice there was a fundamental flaw: Germany alone didn’t possess the raw materials and foodstuffs.

The solution, as Hitler informed his inner circle, to the question of “gaining space for agricultural use” was simple: “Germany’s problem could be solved only by the use of force.”

This policy of acquiring living space, known as *Lebensraum*, had been a central plank of Germany’s imperialist strategy in the late 19th century and Hitler had resurrected it in the 1920s. Ultimately he dreamed of a war with Russia, one in which he would simultaneously eradicate Bolshevism and acquire their territory for Nazi Germany.

The idea of German expansion would have been laughable at the start of the 1930s; laughable and unfeasible, given the swingeing terms of the Versailles Treaty of 1919. But, within a week of being appointed chancellor in January 1933, Hitler informed his ministers that “the next five years in Germany must be devoted to the rearmament of the German people... [our]



TOP LEFT: Italian premier Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler arrive in Munich, 1938

ABOVE: Erzberg mountain, Austria, where a Mauthausen labour subcamp held slave labourers for quarrying

LEFT: Austrian crowds enthusiastically welcome the country's "return to the great German mother-country", 1938

position in the world will be decisively conditioned by the position of Germany's armed forces".

Hitler was true to his word, and by 1935 there were around 75,000 workers engaged in aircraft construction, labouring to meet the *führer's* target of 17,000 aircraft by 1939. There was similar frenetic activity underway to strengthen the navy, at a cost of 111 million Reichsmarks, while the Krupp manufacturing company began the discreet production of hundreds of 'agricultural tractors' in the summer of 1933 – vehicles more commonly known as tanks.

Parallel to the production of tanks, planes and ships was the introduction in May 1935 of compulsory military service. From a figure of 100,000 men in 1933,

the army (including reservists) swelled to 793,000 personnel within three years, a further reason for Hitler to feel confident enough to talk of territorial expansion.

There remained the problem of Britain and France, and their possible reaction to his quest for greater living space, but, from what Hitler had seen so far of both countries, he believed they would go to any lengths to avoid another ruinous war.

Designs on Austria

It was only natural that Hitler should look to Austria first in his expansionist strategy. It was the country of his birth and it pained him to see how it had diminished following the postwar dismembering of the Habsburg empire; it was a divided country in which

socialists, Catholic conservatives and pan-Germans cohabited uneasily.

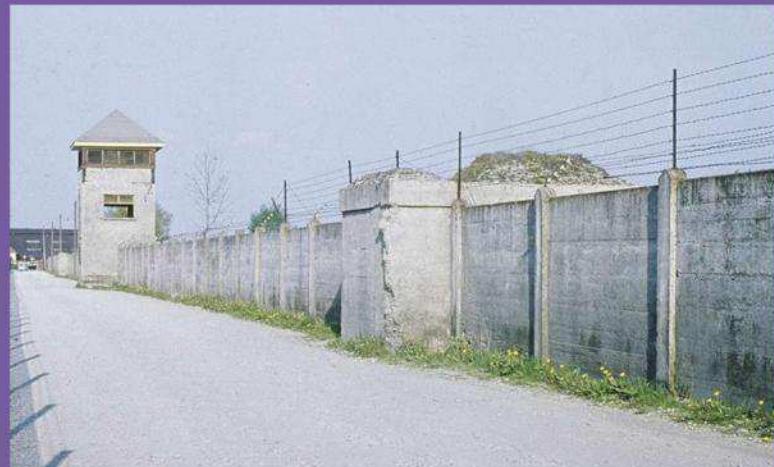
Hitler's desire for a union (*Anschluss*) between the two countries had been outlined in *Mein Kampf*, his ideological autobiography written in the early 1920s: "German-Austria must return to the great German mother-country," he wrote. "One blood demands one Reich."

On becoming chancellor, Hitler initially trod carefully around what he called the 'Austrian question', mindful that he didn't wish to antagonise Italy's Fascist leader, Benito Mussolini. But as Italy became embroiled in the Abyssinian (present-day Ethiopia) conflict – revealing it not to be the military superpower Hitler had imagined – so Germany began making plans to



Concentration camps before the war

Incarcerating opponents and 'undesirables' was key to Hitler's empire-building



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:
Inmates at work in Oranienburg concentration camp in 1933, one of the first to be established by the Nazis in Prussia; Dachau, one of the camps where political opponents were sent as the Nazis expanded their territory; former Czech inmates of Mauthausen and Buchenwald camps are returned home by truck, 1945; dissenters such as communists, 'asocials' and trade unionists in Dachau, 1933

The concentration camps that began appearing when Hitler seized power in 1933 housed predominantly the Nazis' political opponents. But by the summer of 1934 most of the communists, social democrats and trade unionists had been released on the orders of state prosecutors. It was to prove only a brief hiatus as the Nazis set about establishing a more rigorous and efficient system of camps.

The 'flagship' was Dachau, under the command of Theodor Eicke, a violent ex-policeman, whose reorganisation of the camp so impressed SS chief Heinrich Himmler that he was appointed the inspector of concentration camps in Germany. By 1937 there were only four

remaining – Dachau, Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen and Lichtenburg (a women's camp) – an indication of how comprehensively the Nazis had crushed the political resistance. But with their grip on power now unassailable, the Nazis felt able to begin purging Germany of 'undesirables' so the camps became, in the words of the historian Richard J Evans, "dumping grounds for the racially degenerate".

Soon a steady flow of people the Nazis classified as gypsies, prostitutes, vagrants, beggars, petty criminals and even the long-term unemployed were heading through the camp gates. Considered a stain on the Third Reich, they were treated

brutally and the death rate at Buchenwald, for example, rose from 48 inmates among the 2,200 inmates in 1937 to 1,235 deaths among the 8,390 inmates in 1939.

Two new camps (Mauthausen and Flossenbürg) were opened to meet the increased demand and inmates were forced to work in quarries to provide the material to build Hitler's envisaged 1,000-year empire. By 1939 there were around 21,000 prisoners in the Nazis' concentration camps, all subjected to appalling indignities by their SS guards. "You're dishonourable and defenceless!" a new group of inmates were told on arrival at Buchenwald. "You're without rights. Your fate is a slave's fate."

arrogant Austria and make use of its iron-ore deposits.

A pact between Germany and Austria, signed in July 1936, saw Germany promise to respect Austrian sovereignty. But after the conference with his inner circle in Berlin in November 1937 Hitler ratcheted up the pressure on Austria. In February 1938, he hosted Kurt Schuschnigg, the Austrian chancellor, at his Alpine retreat in Bavaria. It wasn't so much a discussion as a tirade, launched by Hitler against his Austrian counterpart: "I have an historic mission, and this I will fulfil because Providence has destined me to do so," he warned Schuschnigg, adding ominously: "Perhaps I'll appear sometime overnight in Vienna, like a spring storm. Then you'll see something."

Hitler demanded a raft of concessions from Schuschnigg, notably the integration of Austria's economic system into Germany's; failure to comply would result in invasion. Schuschnigg appealed to Britain for support, but was told in a telegram: "His Majesty's Government are unable to guarantee protection."

On the same day, 11 March, Hitler also received a message from overseas – from Mussolini, who said Italy saw no objection to Germany's intervention in Austria. Hitler was delighted and the next morning his troops crossed into Austria. Hitler followed in their wake, and in his address to a cheering crowd of a quarter of a million on 15 March in Vienna, the führer said the invasion of Austria was the start of a "new mission" of the "Eastern Marches of the German People".

Sudetenland and beyond

Hitler now had his 'Greater Germany', and the ease and speed with which he had seized Austria fuelled his thirst for more conquests. Britain and France had proved themselves weak and cowardly, and – emboldened by their feebleness – the Nazis now increased their internal persecution of Jews and other 'undesirables'.

But it was in the aftermath of the Anschluss that Hitler embarked down a route that would, as had been the case with Napoleon, another European dictator giddy with power, lead to his eventual downfall. Not that his acolytes could have imagined it at the time. "He's always pondering new plans," wrote Joseph Goebbels, minister of propaganda, of his leader. "A Napoleonic nature!"

Thus far, Nazi Germany's foreign policy had been revisionist, righting perceived wrongs inflicted by the Versailles Treaty. But in the summer of 1938 Hitler set out on a course that would, he guessed, lead to



Hitler oversees his troops marching towards Poland, September 1939. The ease with which he'd taken Austria and Czechoslovakia led the führer to believe Germany was unconquerable

war with the western powers – although not, he believed, until 1943. In the interim, he planned to incorporate the Sudetenland (the German-speaking region of Czechoslovakia) into the Reich.

At first, many of Hitler's military commanders were fearful of such a policy, but when Britain and France signed the Munich Peace Agreement in September 1938, whereby the Czechoslovakian government – not even invited to the talks – was forced to hand over the Sudetenland to Germany, the doubters were outnumbered by the expansionists.

In March 1939, Hitler invaded the rest of Czechoslovakia, an act that was contrary to the terms of the Munich Agreement. But Hitler was set on continued expansion, telling his inner circle: "Our enemies are worms. I saw them in Munich."

Hitler now believed he was invincible

There remained the problem of Britain and France, but Hitler believed they'd go to any lengths to avoid another ruinous war

and Germany unconquerable. His Reich would last 1,000 years and its next addition would be Poland. There was, of course, the threat posed by the Soviet Union, but it would be severely dealt with by Hitler at a later date; for the time being it was in both nations' interest to sign a non-aggression pact, which they did on 23 August 1939, just as the Nazis put their finishing touches to their plans to invade Poland.

Hitler spent much of the summer of 1939 at his holiday house in the Bavarian Alps. He was surprisingly relaxed, confident that when he ordered the invasion of Poland, Britain would back down from its stated intention of coming to its aid. One or two of his inner circle lacked his confidence. "Is it worth going for broke?" asked Göring. "In my life I've always gone for broke," replied Hitler.

On 1 September, Germany invaded Poland, and two days later Britain made good on its promise and declared war, as did France. Hitler was stunned. "What now?" he angrily demanded of Joachim von Ribbentrop, minister of foreign affairs.

The answer was a war that would, ultimately, destroy the Third Reich, bring Germany to the brink of collapse and cost the lives of more than 50 million. ■

Gavin Mortimer is a historian and the author of several books on the Second World War

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VOICES OF THE HOLOCAUST

In the aftermath of the war, an American academic toured Europe to record the stories of those who lived through the Holocaust. **Mark Burman** relates the poignant and distressing stories he found there

UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, PAUL V. GALVIN LIBRARY,
ILLINOIS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY/GETTY IMAGES

foreground: David Boder, pictured in 1946 with his state-of-the-art Armour wire recorder

background: Russian and Polish women liberated from a forced labour camp near Düsseldorf, Germany, 1945





A man checks the numbers tattooed on the arms of Jewish Polish prisoners arriving from Auschwitz at Dachau concentration camp after its liberation in April 1945

Wiesbaden, Germany, late September 1946. It was the Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashanah. Judgement Day. The day the Lord records the deeds of the righteous, the wicked and the rest of us. But inside the war-damaged and newly reconsecrated synagogue, a different kind of recording was taking place, one intended not for divine judgement but for the edification of the American public.

Here sat a 59-year-old academic with 27kg of recording equipment by his side, including a state-of-the-art wire recorder. Three months earlier David Boder had left the comforts of his university in Chicago to heave his bulky machine and over 200 wire spools across a broken

Europe. His intention was to record the immediate experiences of trauma from 'displaced persons'.

More than 100 had already shared their lives with him by this point – civilian survivors of Nazi terror. Boder began in relative ignorance, but by now had heard so much that he had assembled inside his head a topography of terror like some great, mournful jigsaw. This interview in Wiesbaden is one of the final pieces. For the past hour, a young woman by the name of Anna Kovitzka had been telling her tale of survival and loss in Yiddish – one of the nine languages that Boder spoke. Broken by bouts of sobbing throughout, her tragic narrative was drawing to a close.

"Now I am working... in a kindergarten. There are 20 little Jewish children.

And I play with them, and then I forget about all that [my past]. Again I have around me Jewish children. But after work, to come alone to my room... Today is a holiday. Where are all mine, who used to celebrate the holidays with me?... But my people are no more. I am alone."

She gives a little half-sob and her voice trails off, lost in the gathering gloom of an autumn afternoon. You can sense Boder drawing himself up, nervous, exhausted, knowing it's time to go but left with a young woman whose painful memories are raw, open wounds.

Anna's war began in September 1939 and never stopped. First the German bombs began falling on her home town of Kielce, Poland, followed by a never-ending process of round-ups, ghettos,

labour camps, death marches and finally liberation on 1 April 1945 – ironically in the middle of Passover – by the American infantry. She had given up her baby to a Polish neighbour for safe-keeping, only to discover just months before the war's end that the neighbour had been betrayed and her child murdered. Anna lost everything and everyone who mattered to her.

As the wire spool nears its end, Boder leans into the microphone, adding in his deeply accented English: "We have to conclude... what we have heard from this woman... is about a story what we have heard from everybody... I am just in a trance after this woman's report... Who is going to sit in judgment of all this, and who is going to judge my work? I am leaving tonight for Paris; the project is concluded."

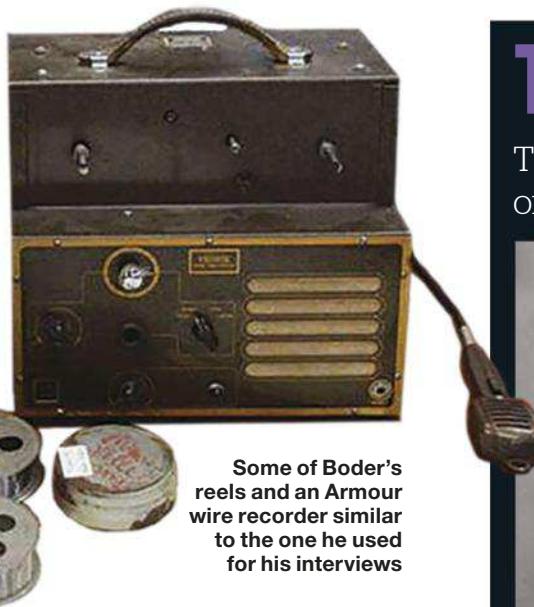
But Boder's remarkable project was in reality only just beginning. Only long after his death in December 1961 was the lengthy process finally completed when the full transcriptions and translations of all of his 1946 interviews were made available on a website, the Voices of the Holocaust project, in late 2009. With the project's completion, it is us who today can "sit in judgment" on his work, and it is nothing short of remarkable and overwhelming.

Raw emotions

Today, news cameras nosing through tent cities and the physical and human rubble of war and disaster are a familiar sight. But clicking on the Voices of the Holocaust project website – where you can hear Boder's original recordings – is to be returned directly to the turmoil and barely understood tragedies at the end of the Second World War. These recordings represent the earliest known oral histories of the Holocaust, conducted before most had even begun processing and attempting to cope with their experiences.

The narratives are wrapped in the chaotic world around them, conducted in make-shift interview rooms in displaced persons camps or orphanages. Traffic noise bleeds through from the streets, people intrude, bicycles are wheeled out and the interviewees fumble uncertainly with the magic of technology that is capturing their story for the very first time.

For five years these people had been reduced to tattooed numbers, *untermenschen* (inferior people), processed and beaten masses, victims. Now Boder was asking them to simply tell their story since their war began.



Some of Boder's reels and an Armour wire recorder similar to the one he used for his interviews

These people had been reduced to tattooed numbers, victims. Now Boder asked them to simply tell their story

Take 13-year-old Raisel 'Rose' Meltzak for instance, whose story resembles a fragment from a Brothers Grimm fairy tale. Little Raisel, hugging her knees, rocking back and forth and forever lost in the dark forest as Boder tries to manage her ragged account. Hunted, beaten and robbed by both the local Ukrainian population and those working for the Nazi occupiers, Rose watches her family disintegrate. Until, her father arrested, their possessions gone and her mother nearly hysterical, they lose her baby brother to hunger, his belly swollen and distended.

Meltzak: The brother was already dead. And my mother cried so much. In the forest there are many – how does one say it? – drzewa?

Boder: 'Trees'.

Meltzak: Trees. So she began to do it so, with her head [she apparently demonstrates]. She had such bumps.

Boder: She beat herself...

Meltzak: Yes.

Boder: ...against the trees?

Meltzak: Yes. And she cried so very much. She screamed. She could not bear it. After my brother died we... we buried him.

Boder: Who buried him?

Meltzak: I with the mother.

Listen to the file of Abraham Kimmelmann, and the encounter is very

The CV

The life and work of David Boder



NAME: David Boder
(born Aron Mendel Michelson)

BORN: 9 November 1886, Libau, Latvia

KEY MOMENTS:

- 1907: Marries Pauline Ivianski and has a daughter, Elena. They divorce soon after
- 1917: Now working in Omsk, Siberia, he marries Nadejda Chernik
- 1919: Flees to Japan, then Mexico to escape the Russian Civil War. Nadejda dies in the Mexican flu epidemic
- 1925: Marries Russian-born American, Dora Neveloff. Becomes US citizen in 1932
- 1927–34: Psychology MA from University of Chicago, and PhD from Northwestern University, Evanston, IL
- Mid-1930s–early 1940s: Hired at Lewis Institute (later Illinois Institute of Technology) where he develops its psychology department, launches a psychology museum and works at Michael Reese hospital
- 1945: Begins working on his DP (displaced persons) project
- 1946: Sets sail for Europe on board USS *Brazil* to conduct interviews in France, Italy, Switzerland and Germany, across 16 interview sites
- 1949: *I Did Not Interview the Dead* is published by the University of Illinois Press. Boder suffers heart attack but recovers and self-publishes 70 transcripts between 1953 and 1957
- 1954: Analytical essay of his DP work, *The Impact of Catastrophe*, published in *The Journal of Psychology*
- 18 December 1961: Dies of heart attack in Los Angeles, CA



Songs of death, songs of life

David Boder asked some of those he interviewed to sing to him. But why?

Jews singing at Theresienstadt, a 'model' camp used in propaganda to present Nazi 'benevolence'



David Boder frequently began his interview sessions by asking a person or a group to sing a song, both to demonstrate his recording technology and in an attempt to put his subjects at ease. These songs had been sung either as acts of resistance, of solace, or to retain, even if only in verse, fragments of time, place and people. They detail life in the ghettos, konzentrations lagers and extermination camps or speak of the new lives that await, chiefly in Palestine, then almost unreachable under British mandate.

The songs are throaty, raw renditions.

They have no musical accompaniment and are nearly all performed in Yiddish. 'Es Brent' (It Is Burning) was written in 1938 by Mordechai Gerbertig following a pogrom in Poland; 'On a Heym, on a Dakh' (Without a Home, Without a Roof) recounts how deportees wander lost through the night; while 'Dort in dem Lager' (There in the Camp) is a haunting rendition of loneliness, suffering and the loss of family.

Forty or so of these songs have been digitally restored by the Voices of the Holocaust project.

Child survivors of Auschwitz in February 1945. This photo was taken during the making of a film about the liberation of the camp

different. Kimmelmann is a soul wise and scarred far beyond his 17 years. Calm, collected and confrontational, Kimmelmann was able to challenge the much older Boder to his very core.

Kimmelmann: I want to ask you here a question. Are the psychologists really so far advanced that they really know human nature so well, that they really can 'imagine' the various human qualities?

Boder: Absolutely no.

Kimmelmann: You are entirely right. I didn't ask you simply because I wanted to know, because I know it already. I just wanted to hear it from you. Because after all that what I have seen, I know that one knows nothing yet.

Certainly, what Boder knew before he began his remarkable project was limited to what he had seen on the newsreels: skeletal survivors staggering in front of the camera upon liberation, or newspaper accounts by Allied combat correspondents encountering the camps.

By the time he talked to Kimmelmann, he was becoming painfully aware of the



Two Jewish resistance fighters are arrested by German troops after the Warsaw ghetto uprising of 1943

geography and process of annihilation. Throughout he had been asking questions of his subjects. Where is Birkenau? How could any SS guard beat you? Were you paid for your labour? Which way would the women and children go to the gas? How could you run so fast after being cooped up in a cattle truck?

Young Kimmelman had just detailed the collaboration of the Jewish police in the round-up process, explaining how it is possible for a starving person to consume 15 litres of soup spilled onto a floor. Now he describes, in the mangled German he has learnt in the camps, the way a man loses hope and life on a death march. "A man full of his senses, in whom everything is still functioning, he is feeble and can't run any more, he stands by himself under a tree, his eyes shining like, like reflectors. And he waits for the moment when the whole formation will have passed by, 'til the hindmost guards will arrive with the block leader, also an SS man, who will shoot him. Can you imagine what this is? A man with his full mental abilities, who knows what is going on and he waits for death."

Overwhelming task

Boder's original intention had been to interview survivors, perpetrators and local Germans who had lived near the various camps. But he was swiftly overwhelmed by the sheer scale and mechanical process of annihilation that was being recounted to

In a never-changing monotone, the interviewee related horror after horror

him by so many Jewish survivors in the wreckage of Europe.

It was a Europe Boder thought he had left behind long ago. He was no historian himself but a psychologist, a keen advocate of the new mind sciences. His own travels had taken him far from his roots in Libau, Latvia, where he was born in 1886. He had grown up in that multilingual twilight world of the tsar's empire, with an education both secular and religious that gave way to a passion for the emerging discipline of psychology. A career spanning Europe, Japan and Mexico finally took him to Chicago, where he developed the psychology department of the Lewis Institute, now the Illinois Institute of Technology.

But what sent Boder on his remarkable expedition? The practice of recording patient interviews by both psychiatrists and analysts was already established. Boder's institute had been involved with technological innovation for the war effort, giving him access to sophisticated, if bulky, wire recorders.

Oral history as a practice did not exist, but Boder knew he wanted to preserve an

immediate and authentic record of wartime suffering, as well as gathering data on trauma and its impact on personality. He also wanted to increase the American public's knowledge of what had happened in Europe, and highlight America's intransigent immigration policy, then still operating at prewar levels, to allow the hundreds of thousands of displaced persons to begin a new life.

From the first days of peace he began to work his way through the endless bureaucratic processes of getting himself out to Allied-occupied western Europe. It took him 14 months to raise funds – mortgaging his house in the process – and convince the relevant authorities of the veracity and worth of a project that must have been hard for them to grasp. He finally sailed for Europe in late July 1946 aboard the *USS Brazil*, which also carried delegates for the Paris Peace Conference.

Boder had no formal questionnaire and no definite idea of who to talk to – only his training in clinical interviewing and his multilingual, nuanced understanding of east Europe's fault lines. He travelled across France, Switzerland, Italy and Germany, visiting smaller displaced persons hostels or orphanages and asking for people who wished to share their accounts. He avoided those who wanted to read from a prepared script, and attempted to gather as broad a cross-section of experience as he could with the limited time, funds and spools available to him.

He wasn't the only one asking questions. Both the authorities and the remnant of the Jewish communities were busily gathering facts, names and places. But Boder wanted people to simply tell him about their lives for the last five years.

In one of his most powerful and shocking interviews, Boder turns to the microphone to indicate the scars on the tongue of his subject, Benjamin Piskorz – the result of a nail being driven through it by his SS torturers. Piskorz is a clearly disturbed young man who fought in the ruins of the Warsaw ghetto, watched his mother burnt in front of him and eventually escaped, disguised as a German soldier. In a never-changing monotone, Piskorz related horror after horror to Boder, including his own acts of horrific and murderous revenge against German children.

A different world

Understandably, the trip changed Boder. On his return to Chicago he struggled to transcribe and use the interviews while faced with the normality of teaching and lecturing. He made contact with the

Survivors of the Schwandorf death train, carrying Jews across Germany, are evacuated by wagon, April 1945



relatives of some of those he interviewed, playing back their voices. The book that followed, *I Did Not Interview the Dead* (University of Illinois Press, 1949), presented eight of the interviews. Altogether 70 interviews would eventually be published, as Boder continued to write lengthy academic articles in psychological publications detailing his concerns with trauma, language and comparative catastrophe.

But ill health dogged him, perhaps due to the massive efforts this far from young and fit man had made struggling across Europe with his bulky recording equipment, and the efforts to promote these narratives back in the USA. He died of a heart attack in 1961.

What happened thereafter is confusing, elusive and goes some way towards explaining the failure of oral and Holocaust historians to have drawn upon his remarkable archive any sooner. The original recordings were lost, although copies were sent both to Israel and the Library of Congress in Washington DC. His old alma mater, the Illinois Institute of

Boder's recordings, conducted so soon after the war, remain unique and utterly absorbing

Technology in Chicago, effectively forgot about them until relatively recently. Now all of the surviving interviews have undergone a major upgrade and can be heard and accompanied by time-matched transcripts in either English or their original language.

Oral histories with survivors of the Holocaust chiefly began in the 1950s and there are now tens of thousands of interviews, both video and audio. Archives have been collected at Yad Vashem Museum in Jerusalem, the British Library's collection of National Life Stories in London and the Spielberg-

backed University of Southern California's Shoah Foundation Institute, and can all be accessed online.

But Boder's recordings, conducted so soon after the war, remain unique and utterly absorbing. To hear them is to once again enter a room somewhere in Europe as a young man or woman leans forward and, for the first time, shares a life that for five years has been shattered, and for this wise and gentle interviewer to accumulate another fragment in his terrible mosaic. ■

Mark Burman is an award-winning radio producer. He covered David Boder's interviews with Holocaust survivors on *Archive Hour* on BBC Radio 4

DISCOVER MORE

WEBSITE

► <http://voices.iit.edu>
The Illinois Institute of Technology's Voices of the Holocaust website, where you can hear and read Boder's interviews and find out more about him

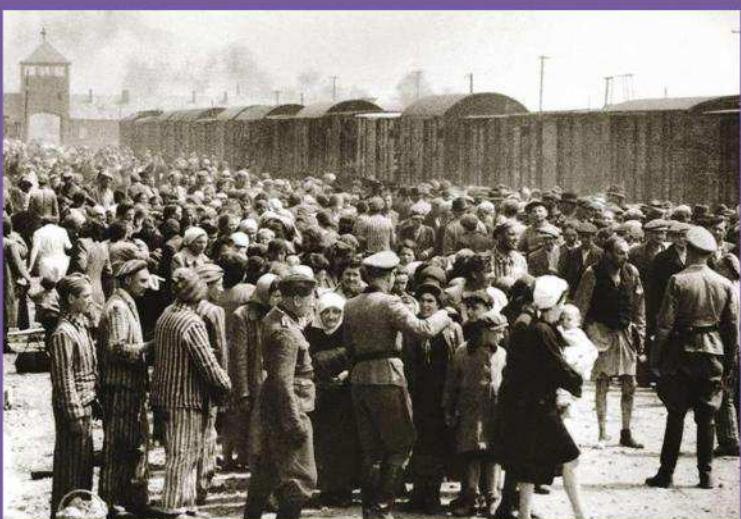
SEWING FOR THE NAZIS

The dressmakers of Auschwitz



Costume historian **Lucy Adlington** explores Auschwitz's fashion workshop, where a group of female prisoners were forced to serve as seamstresses for their Nazi captors

Nazi ideology / Dressmakers of Auschwitz



Camp arrivals
Hungarian Jews arrive in Auschwitz, June 1944. Having sewing skills could help prisoners who'd been forced to hand over their own clothes – and could also save them from the gas chamber

Ghetto workshop
Jewish women forced into factory work for the Nazis in occupied Poland, 1941, making clothes for German citizens and army personnel

Anti-Semitism in Hitler's Third Reich was fuelled not just by state-endorsed racism but also by personal greed. Indeed some perpetrators of the Final Solution put far more value on Jewish plunder than they did on Jewish lives, and high-ranking Nazi officials and their families were more than happy to wear clothes created by those they considered on a par with vermin.

Nothing highlights this obscene indulgence more than the establishment of a fashion workshop – known as the Upper

Tailoring Studio – in the middle of Auschwitz. Thousands of people were forced to work in sewing workshops set up in ghettos and concentration camps during the Second World War. However, this particular workshop was not for making or mending military uniforms. Instead, it was created purely for a vain elite to satisfy their love of fashion, in the middle of a hell on Earth.

The Auschwitz commandant's wife, Hedwig Hoess, had come a long way from her 'back to the land' rural roots when she first employed two local Polish seamstresses to sew in her villa overlooking the concentration camp. Hedwig called life in the villa

"paradise". There she could indulge in luxury items from the best couture houses of Europe. These included fabrics and fashions selected from the mounds of plunder being processed in vast warehouses in the camp, just a short distance from her beloved flower garden. Prisoners carried out the processing of goods, even coming across belongings of their own murdered relatives as they did so. When other officers' wives and female guards grew envious of her wardrobe, Hedwig opened an elite dressmaking workshop – the Upper Tailoring Studio – inside the camp itself.

A needle was a prized possession in the



Reprieved few

Women deemed fit for work, Auschwitz, 1944. Jobs for women included cooking, laundry and cleaning. A role in the Upper Tailoring Studio was relatively coveted for at least offering some camaraderie

Sadistic style

An image from a 1942 issue of *Signal* magazine. Some SS wives had no compunction about making camp inmates create the fashion looks they wanted



The workshop was created purely for a vain elite to satisfy their love of fashion, in the middle of a hell on Earth

concentration camp universe. Deportees were deliberately humiliated on arrival at the camps by being forced to undress in public and hand over all their clothes before having all their hair shaved. Vulnerable and degraded, they struggled to hold on to their identity. Those few who survived selection for the gas chambers were given filthy striped uniforms to wear, or a random item of civilian clothing. Having a needle meant being able to patch and repair clothes or even make 'illegal' items such as bras and knickers. Clothes were crucial for protection in harsh weather. Appearance was also a significant factor for morale among inmates



Fabric for fascists

Prisoners sort through confiscated clothes in Auschwitz, 1944. The camp dressmakers were forced to make outfits for their Nazi clients from those stripped from their fellow inmates

who wanted to keep a sense of humanity. However, daring to wear 'forbidden' clothing could result in death if discovered.

A chance to survive

Having a job in the camp offered a slim chance of survival. Those who couldn't work were quickly killed. On the whole, female deportees couldn't boast the professional skills that would set them apart as potentially valuable to their oppressors – in the 1940s, few women were electricians or carpenters, for example. Luckily, textile skills – part of a girl's upbringing in this era – were valued in the camp laundry operation and mending rooms. The tailoring studio at Auschwitz was a unique and highly coveted workplace. It was indoors, there were washing facilities and, most importantly, the seamstresses gained a strong sense of camaraderie, which was crucial for survival.

There were about 23 women in the workshop, with a clever, compassionate Slovakian inmate named Marta Fuchs as their overseer. The women were chosen for their skills, or, like Irene Reichenberg, whose sisters had been murdered on arrival at Auschwitz, because they had connections with existing dressmakers. The dressmakers weren't protected from disease and beatings beyond the workshop walls, but it was at least a haven for part of the day.

Most of the Auschwitz dressmakers were Jewish women. Some are known to historians only by their first names or nicknames, yet even decades after the war stories are still being discovered.

It has only recently come to light that an SS guard smuggled Rezsin Apfelbaum, a Jewish prisoner, into the workshop at night. After a day of hard labour she sewed outfits for the guard's girlfriend, Lilly. The secret

work meant Rezsin secured enough extra bread to keep ten people alive, including two sisters, her mother and two aunts.

At least two women were members of the French resistance: Alida Vasselin, a corsetière who was arrested in 1942 for hiding anti-Nazi leaflets in the corsets she sewed, and Marie-Louise Colombain, a partisan sergeant who carried out militant actions against the Nazis before her arrest in 1941.

They despised their clients. One bold Hungarian-Jewish dressmaker, Lulu Gruenberg, once dared to taunt Hoess's young son with a tape-measure noose in the workshop, saying: "Soon you are all going to hang: your father, your mother and all the others."

Jewish survivor Hermine Hecht reported that on Saturdays "exactly at noon, the SS big shots appeared to pick up their wives' dresses". Fittings took place at the work-



Many SS clients appeared to have had no qualms whatsoever about wearing the gowns of murdered innocents



Dressing the despised

ABOVE: Rezsin Apfelbaum (pictured here before the war) was forced to sew outfits for the girlfriend of an SS guard at night. The secret work provided her with extra rations, enough to sustain ten people

Vicious vanity

LEFT: 'The Hyena of Auschwitz', SS guard Irma Grese, had her own personal dressmaking prisoner to create outfits for her



shops. The seamstresses were required to produce two outfits per client a week. They created new designs, and altered high-quality clothes brought into Auschwitz by Jewish deportees. Many SS clients ordered beautiful evening gowns in fashionable styles, to be worn to dinner parties, music concerts and cinema visits. They appeared to have had no qualms whatsoever about wearing the gowns of murdered innocents, or outfits created by enslaved prisoners. Irma Grese, one of the most sadistic SS guards, even had her own 'pet' dressmaker, a Viennese inmate – name unknown – who kept Grese immaculately turned out for all occasions.

Attempted escape

As the Soviets approached Auschwitz in the bitterly cold January of 1945, the SS evacuated the camp of loot and prisoners, including the dressmakers. The prisoners

left on foot in what became known as 'death marches'.

Irene Reichenberg managed to escape from the marching column. She hid on a Polish farm and was liberated by the Red Army not long afterwards. Four of the tailoring studio dressmakers had organised civilian outfits as part of an escape plan. Marta, the overseer, and three young seamstresses – Borish, Lulu and Baba – approached a passenger train, hoping to blend in with other Polish people. Marta was warned off the attempt, but the other three were caught and shot on the spot. Marta was hidden by local Poles and in return for sanctuary, she sewed their clothes and survived the war. ■

Lucy Adlington is an author and fashion historian. Her novel, *The Red Ribbon* (Hot Key Books, 2017), was inspired by the dressmakers at Auschwitz. It will be released in paperback in July 2018



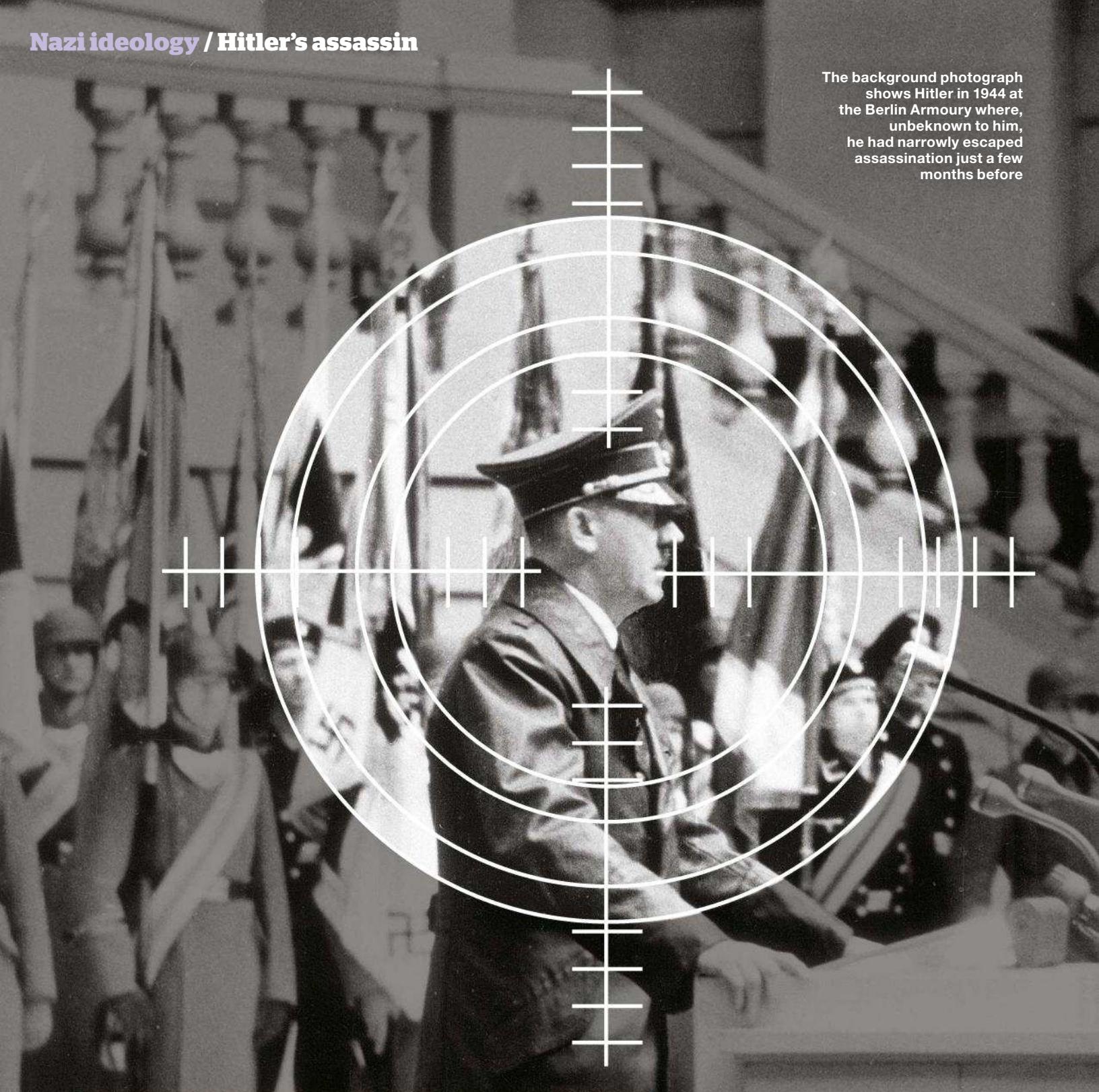


EYE OPENER

Prisoners of the Nazi regime

Political prisoners arrive at Oranienburg concentration camp near Berlin in 1933, the first established by the Nazi regime. The camp initially held political prisoners, most of whom were Communists or Social Democrats, but a number of homosexuals and other "undesirables" were also imprisoned there. By 1935 Oranienburg had closed and was later replaced by the far larger Sachsenhausen concentration camp.

The background photograph shows Hitler in 1944 at the Berlin Armoury where, unbeknown to him, he had narrowly escaped assassination just a few months before



ADOLF'S ASSASSIN



Appalled by the Nazi regime and Hitler's rampant megalomania, German colonel Henning von Tresckow conspired no less than five times to dispatch the *führer*.

Roger Moorhouse tells his story

On 13 March 1943, Colonel Henning von Tresckow, a staff officer of Army Group Centre, was keenly awaiting a VIP visitor to his headquarters at Smolensk, western Russia. His visitor was Hitler, seeking to reinvigorate his battered armies following the crushing defeat at Stalingrad. Tresckow was planning to kill him.

That spring morning, Tresckow drove to the airfield to meet Hitler. He participated in the conference where, according to a fellow officer, he appeared pale and distracted. At its close, he sought out his adjutant for moral support, asking, "Should we really do it?". The reply was unequivocal. Though he had toyed with the idea of using reliable troops to tackle Hitler's security apparatus head-on, Tresckow had opted instead for a time bomb, which he hoped to smuggle onto Hitler's plane after the visit. Just before Hitler's departure, he sought out a member of the entourage travelling back with the Führer and asked if he could take a bottle of brandy for a mutual friend at headquarters. The package that he handed over was wrapped to resemble a square bottle. In fact, it contained two clam charges and a British-made 'time pencil' fuse – sufficient to destroy Hitler's plane.

As Hitler's aircraft climbed into the clear skies above Smolensk that afternoon, Tresckow had good reason to congratulate himself on a near-perfect assassination. He knew the plane was adapted with a number of safety measures, including a parachute attached to Hitler's seat. He knew that the carrying of unaccompanied luggage and parcels was strictly forbidden, and that test flights were supposed to be made in advance of any departure.

Yet, in spite of all that, he had managed to engineer an explosive device, primed and ready, onto Hitler's plane and was confident that it would detonate with sufficient force to kill its passenger. He waited with baited breath for news of the inevitable 'accident'. That news, however, never came. A defective fuse appears to have prevented detonation. Tresckow was initially horrified at the prospect not only of his own exposure, but

also of the unravelling of the wider conspiracy. Yet, after successfully retrieving his bomb, and exchanging it for a genuine bottle of brandy – he resumed his plotting.

"He must be shot down"

Tresckow's motives in seeking to assassinate his commander-in-chief were straight-forward. Though an ardent nationalist and an early enthusiast for the Nazi programme, he had swiftly recognised Hitler's fundamental nihilism and his contempt for the established norms. So already by 1939, when he saw Germany's proud military tradition being corrupted, he viewed high treason as the only way to avert a national catastrophe. As he confided to a colleague, "Hitler is a whirling dervish, he must be shot down".

By 1941, when very few Germans were even beginning to open their eyes to the true horror of the Nazi regime, Tresckow was already planning his first assassination attempt. He was disgusted by the Barbarossa campaign, where he saw the German army being dragged into the illegal, genocidal measures of the SS and Nazi Party. Germany's honour, he believed, was being sacrificed on the altar of Hitler's megalomania.

In truth, such opinions were not widespread in the German military. Though the Wehrmacht (the Second World War German army) was far from uniformly pro-Nazi, it valued authority and obedience as much as any force – and was highly successful. While Hitler was seen to be winning, the prospects for the nascent resistance were bleak. For the majority, opposition to Hitler never went beyond a raised eyebrow or muttered curse. The idea of assassinating him was, for most, simply unthinkable.

He had managed to engineer an explosive device, primed and ready, onto Hitler's plane



Nazi ideology / Hitler's assassin

Hitler pictured in front of an aeroplane. In 1943 Tresckow managed to bypass the Nazi leader's security to smuggle a bomb onto his plane disguised as a brandy bottle. It failed to detonate

INSET RIGHT: Senior army officer Tresckow thought Hitler had to be stopped at all costs, and plotted five times to kill him





Tresckow's attempts

Five daring plots to kill Hitler – and how they failed

- 1** Name of would-be assassin: **Henning von Tresckow**

Date: 4 August 1941

Location: Barysaw, Belarus

Method: Ambush entourage and shoot Hitler

Reason for failure: Aborted due to overwhelming security presence

- 2** Name of would-be assassin: **Henning von Tresckow**

Date: 13 March 1943

Location: Smolensk, western Russia

Method: Time-bomb planted on Hitler's plane

Reason for failure: Defective fuse – device failed to explode

- 3** Name of would-be assassin: **Rudolf-Christoph von Gersdorff**

Date: 21 March 1943

Location: Berlin Armoury

Method: Gersdorff wired as a suicide-bomber

Reason for failure: Insufficient time for fuse to run down

- 4** Name of would-be assassin: **Axel von dem Bussche**

Date: December 1943

Location: Berlin

Method: Suicide-bombing during an inspection of new uniforms

Reason for failure: Inspection cancelled following RAF air raid

- 5** Name of would-be assassin: **Eberhard von Breitenbuch**

Date: 11 March 1944

Location: Berchtesgaden

Method: Shooting during a military conference

Reason for failure: Assassin denied entry to conference

Yet Tresckow's methods of attracting resistance colleagues were surprisingly effective. Often, his most convincing recruiting device was an ability to see the wider picture. When America entered the war, for example, Tresckow recognised that it marked the beginning of the end. He commented sadly: "I wish I could show the German people a film, entitled *Germany at the End of the War*.

Perhaps then they would realise with horror, what we're heading for."

On another occasion, he remarked with uncanny prescience on the long-term resonance that Hitler's rule would have. Confiding to a colleague, he predicted that: "This will still have an effect in hundreds of years, and it will not only be Hitler who is blamed, but rather you and me, your wife and my wife, your children and my children, that woman crossing the street, and that lad there kicking a ball".

From his position as a staff officer of Army Group Centre, he was well placed to collect both like-minded officers and evidence of Nazi misdeeds. His circle grew slowly but would eventually contain both the primary chronicler of the German resistance, Fabian von Schlabrendorff, and the would-be assassin Rudolf-Christoph von Gersdorff. To fellow conspirators he was calm and confident: an "extraordinarily strong personality", wrote one, "who combined military ability with an exceptional political spirit". Most importantly, Tresckow had the gift of persuasion. He never lectured, or appeared sanctimonious, but he was able, a confederate recalled, "clearly and soberly, to convince his listeners of his opinion and to inspire them by his inner calm and his belief in his task".

Tresckow thus inspired colleagues to acts of often astonishing bravery. Only a week after his own failed attempt at Smolensk, he sent his intelligence officer, Rudolf-Christoph von Gersdorff, to Berlin as an assassin. Gersdorff had been requested to act as a guide for Hitler in an exhibition of captured Soviet weaponry in the Berlin Armoury. He armed himself with the same explosives that Tresckow had used a few days

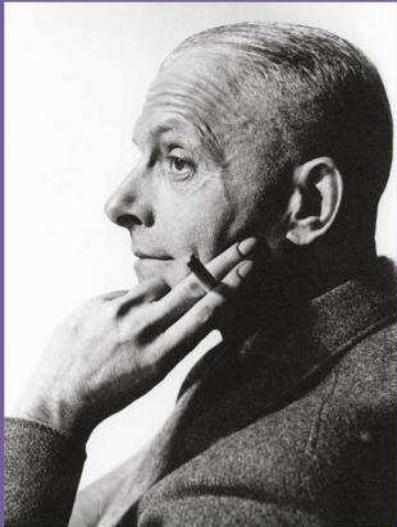
"It will not only be Hitler who is blamed, but rather you and me, your wife and my wife"

Five other would-be assassins

Attempts on Hitler's life ranged from the impassioned zealot working alone to complex plots to overthrow the entire Nazi state

Hans Oster

A major in German military intelligence (the Abwehr), Oster planned to kill Hitler in 1938 while executing a conservative coup against Nazi rule. The plan was aborted when the sabre-rattling against Czechoslovakia was settled by negotiation rather than warfare.

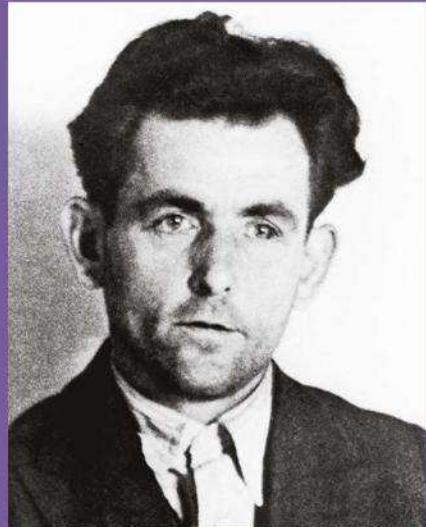


Maurice Bavaud

A Swiss theology student who plotted to shoot Hitler in the autumn of 1938. He was in the crowd at the commemoration of the Munich Putsch that November, but was unable to get a clear shot at his target. Subsequent attempts to secure an audience with Hitler also failed. He was arrested and executed.

Georg Elser

A German carpenter with communist sympathies who planted a time bomb in Munich in 1939 (see right). Though it exploded as planned and claimed eight lives, Hitler had left the hall some minutes previously. Elser was arrested trying to cross the Swiss border and was executed at the end of the war.



Franciszek Niepokólczycki

A major in the Polish underground army, Niepokólczycki master-minded a bomb attack in central Warsaw to coincide with Hitler's visit to the defeated capital in October 1939. Though Hitler's convoy passed directly over it, the device failed to explode. The precise reasons for the failure are still unknown.



Claus von Stauffenberg

A staff officer severely wounded in north Africa, Stauffenberg resolved to kill Hitler. His bomb, planted during a military conference at Rastenburg on 20 July 1944, killed four people, but Hitler was only lightly injured. Stauffenberg was captured and shot that same night in Berlin. His assassination attempt was part of a wider plot, involving many high-ranking conspirators, to seize control of the German state after Hitler's death. Many suspects were arrested, tortured and executed after the failure of what became known as the July Bomb Plot.

Stauffenberg with his sons – he felt killing Hitler was vital to Germany's future

before and paired them with a ten-minute fuse. He planned to act, in effect, as the world's first suicide bomber. However, when the time came for the exhibition, Hitler was distracted and raced through the displays without pausing to allow Gersdorff fatally to delay him. Thwarted, Gersdorff was forced to hurry to the lavatories to defuse himself.

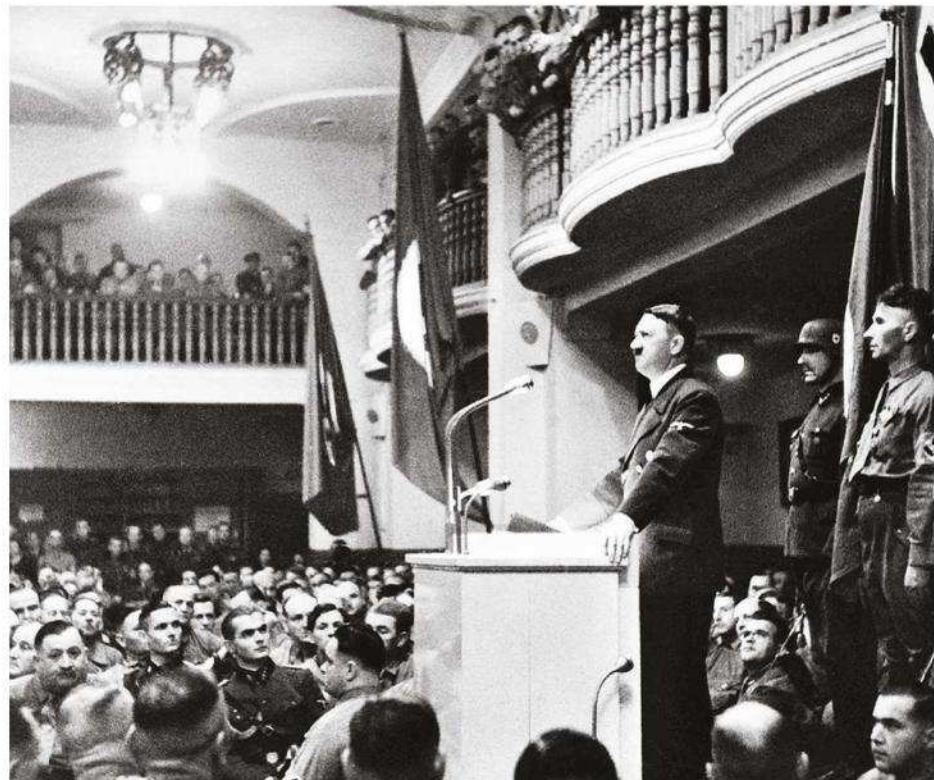
A message to the world

Despite mounting two attempts within seven days, Tresckow had to wait eight months before finding another opportunity to target the increasingly reclusive Hitler. When it came, his next attempt was almost the stuff of farce. That December, an officer was required to demonstrate a new uniform for the Eastern Front and Tresckow had the right man to serve as a model. Axel vom dem Bussche was a decorated soldier from a prestigious regiment, who had begun to entertain serious doubts about the cause for which he was fighting. After approaching the resistance, he was supplied with explosives and suggested as the 'model' for the demonstration. Yet, with only days to go, his attempt had to be aborted after an RAF air raid destroyed the store of new uniforms. Bussche returned to the frontline.

Tresckow's final attempt came in spring 1944, when he was approached by Eberhard von Breitenbuch, a field-marshall's adjutant who had been invited to a conference with Hitler at Berchtesgaden and was willing to undertake an assassination attempt. With Tresckow's help, Breitenbuch was supplied with explosives, but opted instead to use a pistol. However, when the day came and the guests filed into the conference room, Breitenbuch was denied entry as, apparently, Hitler wished to have no aides present that day.

For all his efforts, from that point on Tresckow faded from the reckoning. Promoted to a new post, away from the resistance cell that he had fostered, he was no longer able to influence events. Though well apprised of the ongoing efforts of the resistance, now spearheaded by Claus von Stauffenberg, he appears to have felt that the opportunity to effect real change had already passed, and that the attempt on Hitler's life now had a largely symbolic value. As he confided to a colleague: "The assassination must be attempted at all costs... What matters now is no longer the practical purpose of the coup, but to prove to the world and for the records of history that the men of the resistance movement dared to take the decisive step. Compared to this objective, nothing else is of consequence."

When Stauffenberg launched his now-famous attempt on 20 July 1944, and failed,



Munich 1939: shortly after this photograph was taken, Georg Elser's bomb exploded near the lectern – but Hitler had left the hall just minutes before

Tresckow knew his days were numbered. Despite his distance from the epicentre of the new conspiracy, he knew that, in due course, he would be implicated in it and his earlier role revealed. He reacted with trademark calm resolve, commenting to his adjutant the words that would become his epitaph: "Now they will all fall upon us and cover us with abuse. But I am convinced, now as much as ever, that we have done the right thing. I believe Hitler to be the archenemy, not only of Germany, but indeed of the entire world. In a few hours' time, I shall stand before God and answer for both my actions and the things I neglected to do. I think I can, with a clear conscience, stand by all I have done in the battle against Hitler." With that, he asked his driver to take him to the front in central Poland, where he wandered into no-man's land. There, he simulated an exchange of fire with an enemy, held a grenade to his head and detonated it.

It is perhaps inevitable that Claus von Stauffenberg became the face of German resistance. He, after all, came closest to killing Hitler. He was a man of vigour, dynamism and moral force. Arguably, he

drove the resistance to its bloody conclusion, after its previous efforts had come to nought. Without him, it is unlikely that the 20 July attempt would have been made.

Yet, the original moving spirit of the German military resistance was Henning von Tresckow. Despite being a graduate of the same conservative nationalist milieu that had nurtured Hitler, he recognised the criminal nature of the Nazi regime with absolute clarity. In 1938, for example, when Stauffenberg still disapproved of the resistance, Tresckow was already advocating Hitler's removal, with violence if necessary. He went on to provide a wellspring of principled and impassioned anti-Nazism and form his staff headquarters into a vital cell of the military resistance. And, though lacking the crucial access that Stauffenberg later had to his target, he organised numerous attempts on Hitler's life.

In retrospect, Tresckow deserves better than the relative obscurity to which he has been condemned. He was one of the prime movers of the German resistance; encouraging, persuading and cajoling and becoming one of Hitler's most persistent and determined opponents. Without his practical and psychological preparation, it is hard to imagine the resistance operating as it did, and coming so close to achieving its goal. ■

"I believe Hitler to be the archenemy, not only of Germany, but the entire world"

Roger Moorhouse is the author of several books on modern German history, including *Berlin at War* (Bodley Head, 2010)

THE HISTORY ESSAY



ALAMY

Hitler mounts the steps at the harvest festival rally at Bückeburg in 1934. Extraordinary demonstrations of power such as this were key in strengthening the growing personality cult surrounding the *führer*, says Ian Kershaw

THE LONG SHADOW OF ADOLF HITLER

The Nazi leader was not the only monster of the 20th century – so why does he fascinate us more than any other despot?

By Sir Ian Kershaw

A

dolf Hitler occupies a unique place in history. Almost 130 years after his birth in the small Austrian town of Braunau am Inn, on 20 April 1889, the Nazi leader continues to cast a long shadow over the world. Our enduring fascination with his personality far outstrips our interest in

any other dictator. But why? In a most obvious sense, the answer seems clear: Hitler was the chief author of the most devastating war, and the most terrible genocide, that the world has yet known. Certainly, that is reason enough to register his unparalleled impact on world history. It is also a good part of the reason why there have probably been more publications about Hitler than any other historical figure – apart, perhaps, from Jesus.

Hitler's primary responsibility for the colossal inhumanity of the Nazi regime warrants, of course, another question: what sort of individual could be capable of such unimaginable brutality? But we don't seem to be as concerned about answering this question when it comes to Stalin or Mao, both of whom were also responsible for the deaths of millions. Nor, in the case of Stalin or Mao, do we experience anything like the fascination that the minutiae of Hitler's character continue to exert.

This macabre fascination became more than evident to me from the flood of correspondence that followed the publication of the two volumes of my Hitler biography, in 1998 and 2000. Among the zanier missives I received, I was asked whether Hitler drank Tokaji wine at his wedding to Eva Braun, only hours before their joint suicide in 1945. Almost certainly he didn't – but what difference would it have made had he done so?

Another correspondent suggested that Hitler was descended from the British royal family, claiming that his ear measurements were (allegedly) identical to those of Prince John, the son of George V and Queen Mary. The canard about Hitler visiting Liverpool in 1912 (he didn't) still surfaces repeatedly, despite all efforts to put it to rest. And the drama in the Berlin bunker at the end has woven its own spell, unmatched by the interest in the circumstances of the death of any other modern despot.

Stalin's paranoid refusal to believe that Hitler was dead (though the Soviets had been presented with a piece of jawbone in a cigar box, which could be authenticated as Hitler's) invented mystery where none existed and prompted persistent rumours that Hitler and Eva

Braun had somehow been spirited away at the last to South America. I had numerous enquiries about the nature of Hitler's physical or mental illnesses, and various speculative diagnoses of these. The unstated implication was that if such an illness could be definitively established (it can't), that would be enough to explain world war and genocide; that, if Hitler could be shown to be mad, it would somehow account for the actions of the millions of sane individuals who were nonetheless anxious to put his ideas into practice.

If some of these examples are patently absurd, they serve to highlight the extremes of the continued fascination with Hitler. In part this reflects an adherence to the 'great man' approach to history, bestowing on Hitler a sort of 'negative greatness', as some interpreters have done. Of course, some individuals – and Hitler was certainly one of them – have played major personal roles in shaping history, whatever the circumstances and impersonal determinants that conditioned those roles. However, the enduring preoccupation with Hitler goes far beyond a conventional interest in historical figures of great power and influence.

This stems, in some measure, from our continued sense of astonishment at a story without close parallel in modern history. Here was an individual who, for the first 30 years of his life, was a complete unknown, without education, qualifications, training, military leadership or family connections. Yet in the subsequent 25 years before his death, this figure was able to gain supreme power in one of the most sophisticated, cultured nations on earth. He went on to plunge Europe and the world into a war that cost more than 50 million lives, to instigate a genocide that aimed to wipe out 11 million Jews for no other reason than their ethnicity, and then to

take his own life with the enemy almost literally at his door, his country ruined and occupied by enemy forces and the European continent utterly devastated.

We look for answers in an individual personality commensurate with the enormity of his impact, his hold over much of the German population, the power he wielded, the destructiveness that he produced –



This rare still of Hitler and his mistress (later, wife) Eva Braun is from a private home movie made by Braun's sister Gretl in the early 1940s

THE HISTORY ESSAY

“Hitler isolated his private sphere from his public life – and in an era before prying 24/7 television news and social networks, he was able to sustain this separation to the end”

but we fail to find them. We see nothing in his odd personality, not to speak of his repulsive ideas, to explain such a devastatingly unique historical impact. Hitler remains an enigma.

Partly this is because he cultivated a sense of mystery; indeed, he would not even let himself be photographed until 1923. His bizarre outward appearance carried its own appeal in the cultured salons of Munich's upper crust in the 1920s. He was acutely aware of the importance of public image long before that became a feature of political life. Though mocked by his adversaries, his trademark moustache was just that – a deliberately distinctive feature.

On his path to power, and especially after he became Germany's leader in 1933, propaganda outpourings embellished the enigmatic aura. His ‘court’ photographer, Heinrich Hoffmann, produced a series of bestselling books of pictures that popularised the sense of mystery. They aimed to show Hitler as a man of the people and, at the same time, the political philosopher of genius in lofty isolation, among the mountains that surrounded his Alpine retreat near the township of Berchtesgaden, Bavaria, as he pondered Germany's future and bore the entire burden of responsibility on his shoulders.



Hitler poses with his propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels, the latter's wife, Magda, and three of their children

Hitler himself ensured that little material could be produced by his enemies to challenge or undermine the constructed imagery of heroic genius. The Gestapo seized and destroyed whatever documents they could find relating to his early life; indeed, much of what we know about his time in Linz and Vienna before the First World War is dependent on loaded ‘memoirs’ by a number of individuals who knew him reasonably well.

Only fragmentary evidence remains to elucidate a vital period of his development: a handful of his letters surviving from the First World War, a few official military records, and some recollections of contemporary comrades seen through the distorting mirror of his later fame. Hardly any later personal letters or memorabilia of Hitler himself have survived, because he ordered them all to be destroyed just before his death. He even kept his mistress a secret. Before the demise of the Third Reich, Eva Braun was a name known to hardly anyone in Germany outside Hitler's inner circle. This demonstrates his success in isolating his private sphere from his public life – and in an era before prying 24/7 television news and social networks, he was able to sustain this separation to the end.

Hitler purposely built up a wall of aloofness that very few were allowed to penetrate. He had hardly any intimates or genuine personal friends. Any urge for relaxation was tempered by the need to uphold his image. He did sometimes show a human side to his character: for example, playing with the Goebbels children; in his passionate love of Wagner's music, proclaimed during his visits to the Wagner clan at Bayreuth; or in biting mimicry when among his usual circle at his retreat on the Obersalzberg, near Berchtesgaden. But he was an excellent actor who could play many parts without allowing the mask of his leader's position ever to drop completely.

In his private sphere, Hitler was surrounded by fully fledged adepts of the personality cult of the leader: his regular entourage included his ubiquitous organiser and factotum, Martin Bormann; his adjutants and manservants; his secretaries; his close party cronies and their wives; one or two favourites, such as his propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels, and his wife, Magda; and the architect Albert Speer. They spent time with him at close quarters but, though Goebbels especially was capable of critical insight, swallowed any criticism in favour of adulation. Hitler's ‘achievements’ were magnified.

Above all, his ‘vision’ seemed incomparable. Even at Hitler's Obersalzberg home, the Berghof, there was no real discussion in his presence. When Hitler spoke, everyone listened. No one sought to contradict him or enter into genuine argument. Whether met with rapt fascination or with bored passivity (his audience having often heard similar expositions many times before), the ‘genius’ of the Führer was never questioned.

ALAMY



GETTY IMAGES

Polish prisoners at Buchenwald concentration camp near Weimar, c1943. The world continues to ask what sort of individual could be capable of the brutality displayed by Hitler. Yet it doesn't seem so concerned with asking the same question of Stalin or Mao

THE HISTORY ESSAY

"Hitler was a masterly demagogue. More than any other contemporary German politician, he spoke in a language that gave voice to the anger and prejudice of his audience"



Hitler makes a speech in 1934. He was among the first leaders to utilise radio and film for disseminating propaganda

Hitler was not without ability or knowledge. He was, of course, a masterly demagogue – the basis of his early dominance within the Nazi Party. More than any other contemporary German politician, he spoke in a language that gave voice to the anger and prejudice of his audience. It was effective because the message was both simple and radical – and because it was not the contrived product of a team of advisers and backroom spin-doctors but, rather, reflected his own burning hatreds. He wrote his own speeches and paid great attention to their delivery. Far from mere rants, they were finely attuned to the mood of the audience as he expertly played on the feelings his rhetoric awakened.

He also read a lot, if superficially and essentially to bolster his own prejudice. His excellent memory enabled him to recall information on many subjects. This impressed not only those around him and others who were already susceptible to his message, but also experienced ministers and foreign diplomats who were surprised at his detailed grasp of a complex brief, and military leaders whom he could out-

wit by his awareness of technical specifications of weapons or operational dispositions.

He knew a great deal about aspects of classical music, art and architecture – if within the confines of his limited, inflexible taste – and enough to pontificate about history, religion and culture. This was the knowledge of the opinionated autodidact – but many highly respected politicians have known less, about less.

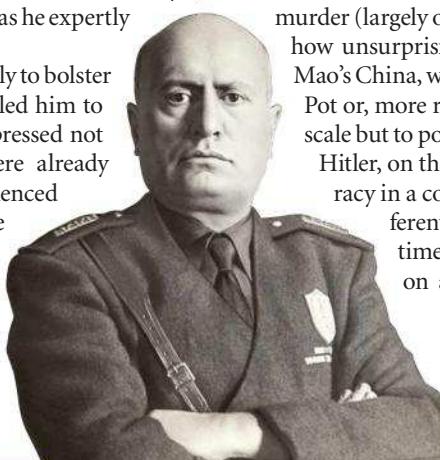
As his path to power and then his dominance of European politics during the 1930s showed, he was also politically astute, especially adept at dividing his opponents and going for the jugular where he detected weakness. It is impossible, however, to separate his talents from the aura of power that was constructed around him – an aura that certainly owed something to his own manufacture but was largely the creation of others.

This aura was elaborated through the regime's extraordinary demonstrations of power: the spectacular Nuremberg rallies; the pervasive death cult manifested in the annual march through the streets of Munich to commemorate the fallen 'martyrs' of the failed putsch of 1923; or the monumental building plans intended to match those left behind by Pharaonic Egypt or classical Greece and Rome. He and Mussolini were also the first state leaders to maximise the use of radio and film for propaganda purposes.

Hitler was the clear focal point of these displays of power. Those of Fascist Italy, of Stalin's USSR, of Mao's China, of present-day North Korea and of other modern despots seem somehow less remarkable. It may be no coincidence that militaria fetishists appear to be far more captivated by German uniforms and SS paraphernalia than by those of Stalin's or any other army.

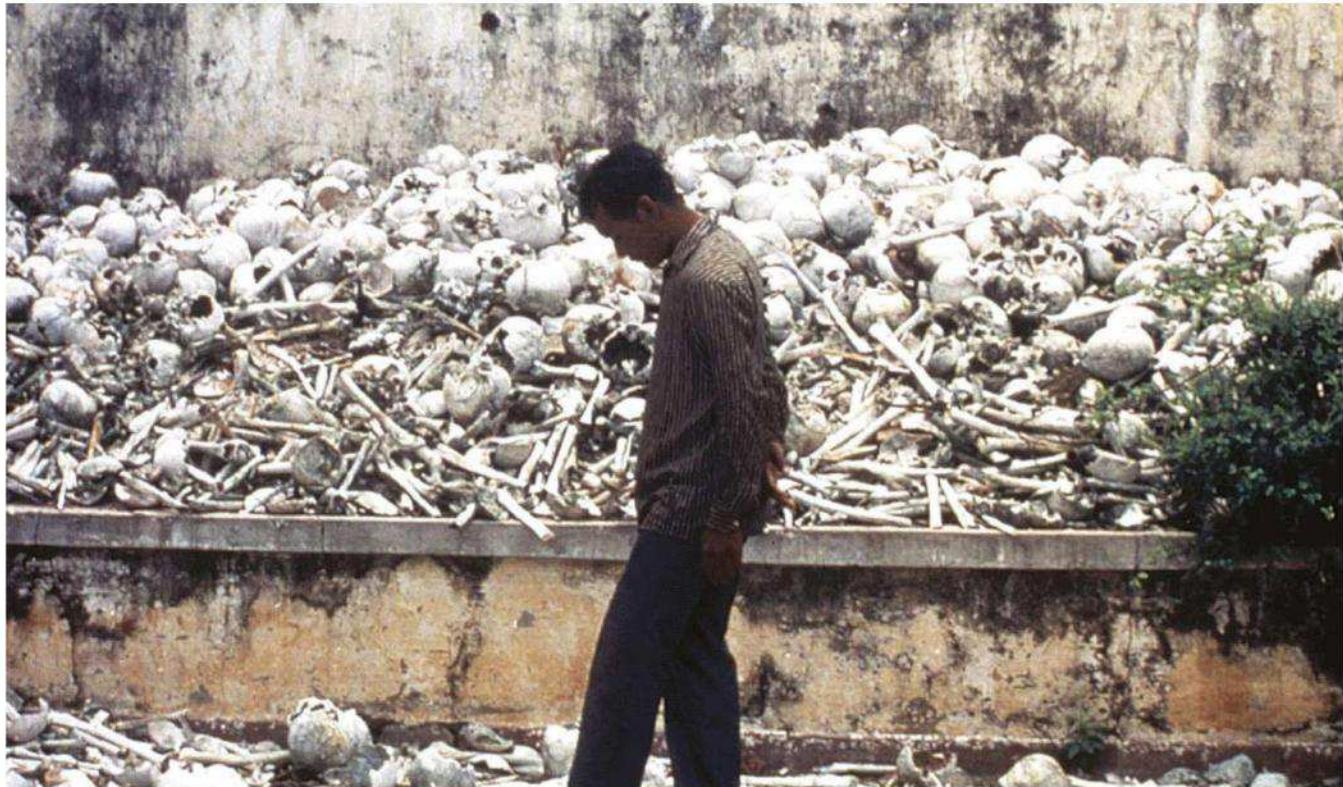
Why is this? Could it be that there is a certain awe, if in a purely negative sense, at the nature of Hitler's vision – the scale of his megalomaniac dreams and ambitions? In the parade of 20th-century despots, Mussolini seems, however misleadingly, not just a scarcely credible buffoon but one whose territorial ambitions betray him as little more than an old-fashioned imperialist in modern garb. Franco seems a dull dictator – highly repressive, but in personal terms an uninteresting, narrow-minded bigot. Stalin looks like a modern variant of Russian tyranny down the ages, his mass murder (largely of his own citizens) mind-boggling yet somehow unsurprising. Even more remote to our mentality is Mao's China, where the horrors – as in Cambodia under Pol Pot or, more recently, in Rwanda – seem unimaginable in scale but to pose no great mystery.

Hitler, on the other hand, triumphed in a liberal democracy in a country not far away and not enormously different from our own. How he was able, in a short time, to transform that country into one engaged on a mission of racial conquest and genocide



Unlike Hitler, Mussolini seems "little more than an old-fashioned imperialist in modern garb"

"Hitler triumphed in a liberal democracy in a country not far away and not enormously different from our own. The horrors of Pol Pot or, more recently, Rwanda, are more remote to our mentality"



A man examines the bones of some of the hundreds of thousands of victims of Pol Pot's regime in Cambodia. What happened here, while "unimaginable in scale", seems to pose less mystery than Hitler's scarcely explicable crimes, says Ian Kershaw

still seems scarcely explicable. And the vision of such horrific megalomania – the obliteration of major cities such as Leningrad or Moscow, the 'ethnic cleansing' of the entire continent and, of course, the death sentence pronounced on millions of Jews – still leaves us spellbound at the sense of the total, unconstrained power that Hitler embodied.

The unprecedented steepness of the descent into untold inhumanity is what underpins the continuing search for a better understanding of the man at its head. Hitler is the face of evil of the 20th century. Yet so successfully did he efface his own biographical remnants that even a most crucial question remains unanswered: we cannot be sure precisely when, why and how he became the pathological anti-Semite without whom the Holocaust – the central emblem of his political evil – is unlikely to have happened.

So should we mark the 130th anniversary of his birth next year? I must confess that I do not greatly warm to the fad for historical anniversaries, and I am still less a fan of the 'great man' approach to historical explanation. To my mind, the eccentricities of Hitler's personality are less crucial than the reasons why the people of Germany were prepared to implement what they saw as Hitler's will.

Still, Hitler's imprint on history was profound. So the anniversary is worth noting, not for any quirky obsessiveness with the minutiae of his character but because it reminds us of the most catastrophic collapse of humanitarian values – values that had lain at the heart of western political and moral thinking since the Enlightenment. And if this collapse happened once in European history, could it do so again? ■

Professor Sir Ian Kershaw is a historian formerly based at the University of Sheffield, and is the best-known modern biographer of Adolf Hitler

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► Ian Kershaw's biographies of Hitler, **Hitler 1889–1936: Hubris** (1998) and **Hitler 1936–1945: Nemesis** (2000), have since been compiled into one volume, **Hitler** (Penguin, 2009)

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Richard J Evans on... **the continued interest in Nazi Germany**

“Supported only by a minority of Germans, the Nazis needed violence to intimidate everyone else into submission”

Nearly three-quarters of a century after it collapsed in ruins, Hitler's self-styled 'Third Reich', far from fading in our collective memory, has become more relevant than ever before. The past few years have seen the rise of new, radically right-wing, populist movements in a number of countries and, in some at least, they have won enough support to pose a serious challenge to democracy.

Strongmen such as Viktor Orban in Hungary or Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey, Vladimir Putin in Russia or Jaroslaw Kaczynski in Poland, are enormously popular with the electorate, and have used their popularity to curb freedom of the press, attack the independence of the judiciary, crack down on political opposition and establish authoritarian regimes which brook little criticism and resist any attempt to unseat them.

Such developments, concerning for anyone who cherishes freedom of expression, liberal institutions and the rule of law, have helped spark a renewal of interest in the rise and triumph of Nazism in Germany in the 1930s. Some have identified similarities between then and now. Democracy is under threat, and in some places has been undermined, not by a sudden military *coup d'état* or an outbreak of revolutionary violence on the streets, but by the electorate itself.

The claim to be legitimated by popular support was a key distinguishing feature of fascist movements and fascist dictatorships in interwar Europe, and we see it being advanced again today. Even more alarming is the tendency of some populist regimes in Europe and elsewhere to encourage xenophobia, hatred of ethnic minorities and fear of foreign immigrants.

Can we learn anything from looking afresh at the history of Hitler and the Nazis? Are there clear parallels between then and now? We need to be cautious before jumping to the conclusion that history is repeating itself. Certainly, Hitler had a good deal of

popular support, but we have to remember that he never won more than 37.4 per cent of the vote in a free national election, and his support from the voting public actually fell significantly in the last free election of them all, in November 1932. The Nazis may have been the largest party, but unlike today's political strongmen, they did not come to power on the back of a majority of the electorate.

What Hitler needed to turn his formal occupancy of the post of Reich Chancellor in a coalition government into a dictatorship was the ruthless deployment of mass violence on the streets. From February to July 1933, hundreds of thousands of his stormtroopers rampaged across Germany, throwing up to 200,000 opponents of the Nazis into newly opened concentration camps, beating them up and murdering many hundreds, possibly even thousands of them.

The violence of Hitler's stormtroopers was extra-judicial, unbridled, uncontrolled, an expression of the extreme hatred they harboured for socialists, communists and, above all, Jews. Supported only by a minority of Germans, the Nazis needed violence to intimidate everyone else into submission. Today's most successful populists can establish dictatorial regimes with the consent of the majority of their electorates.

What happened when the Nazis set up their one-party dictatorship is perhaps more relevant to today's authoritarian regimes. When the rule of law is destroyed, when the press and the judiciary become mere tools of the government, massive corruption and the perversion of justice inevitably follow. The Third Reich became a kleptocracy, as leading Nazis enriched themselves at the expense of others with impunity.

Far more seriously, they were responsible for the murder of up to 200,000 mentally ill and disabled people, and launched a campaign of genocide that killed 6 million of Europe's Jews. When democracy is silenced, who knows what the ultimate consequences will be? ■

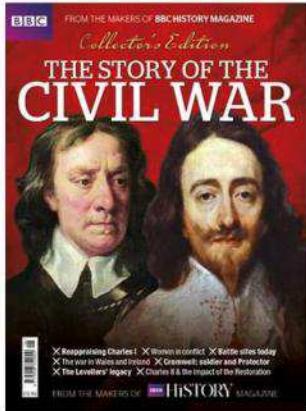


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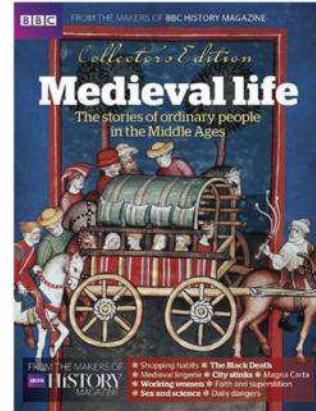
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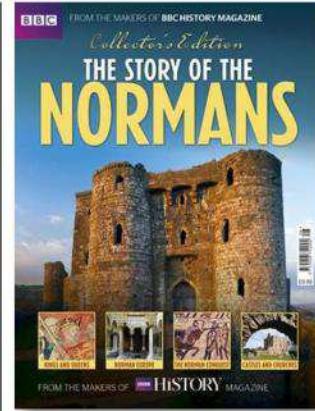
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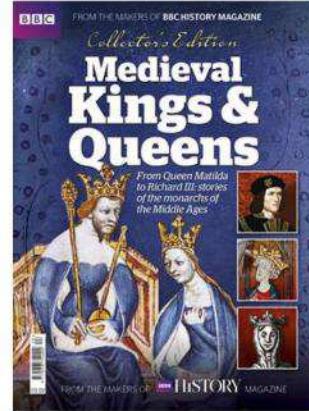
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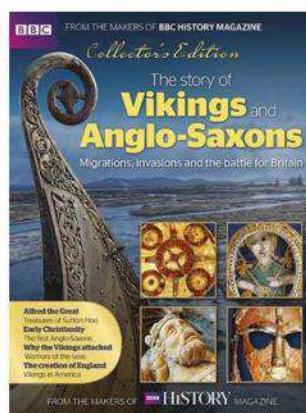
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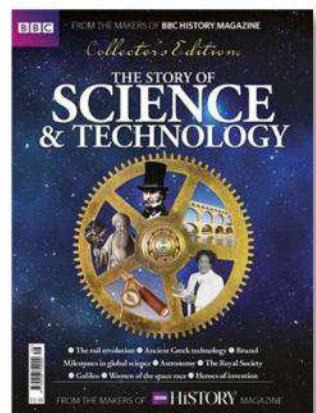
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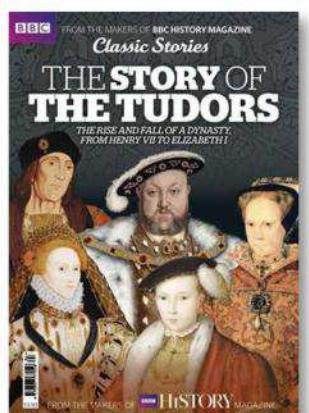
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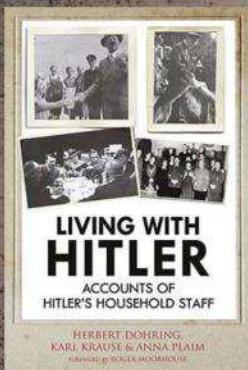
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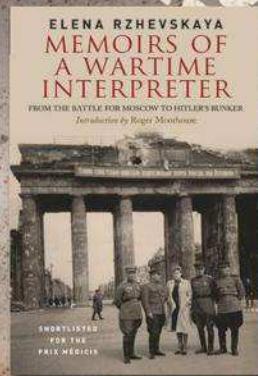
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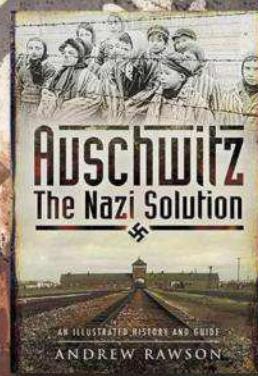
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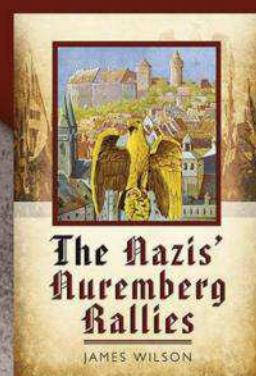
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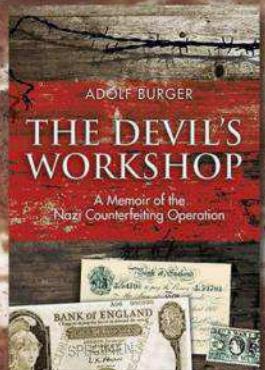
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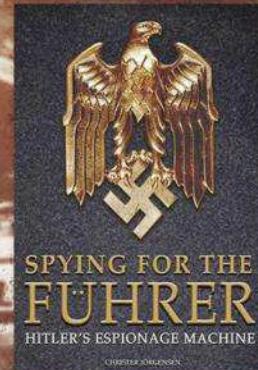
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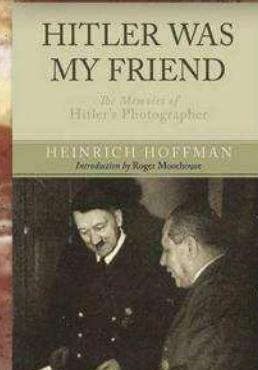
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