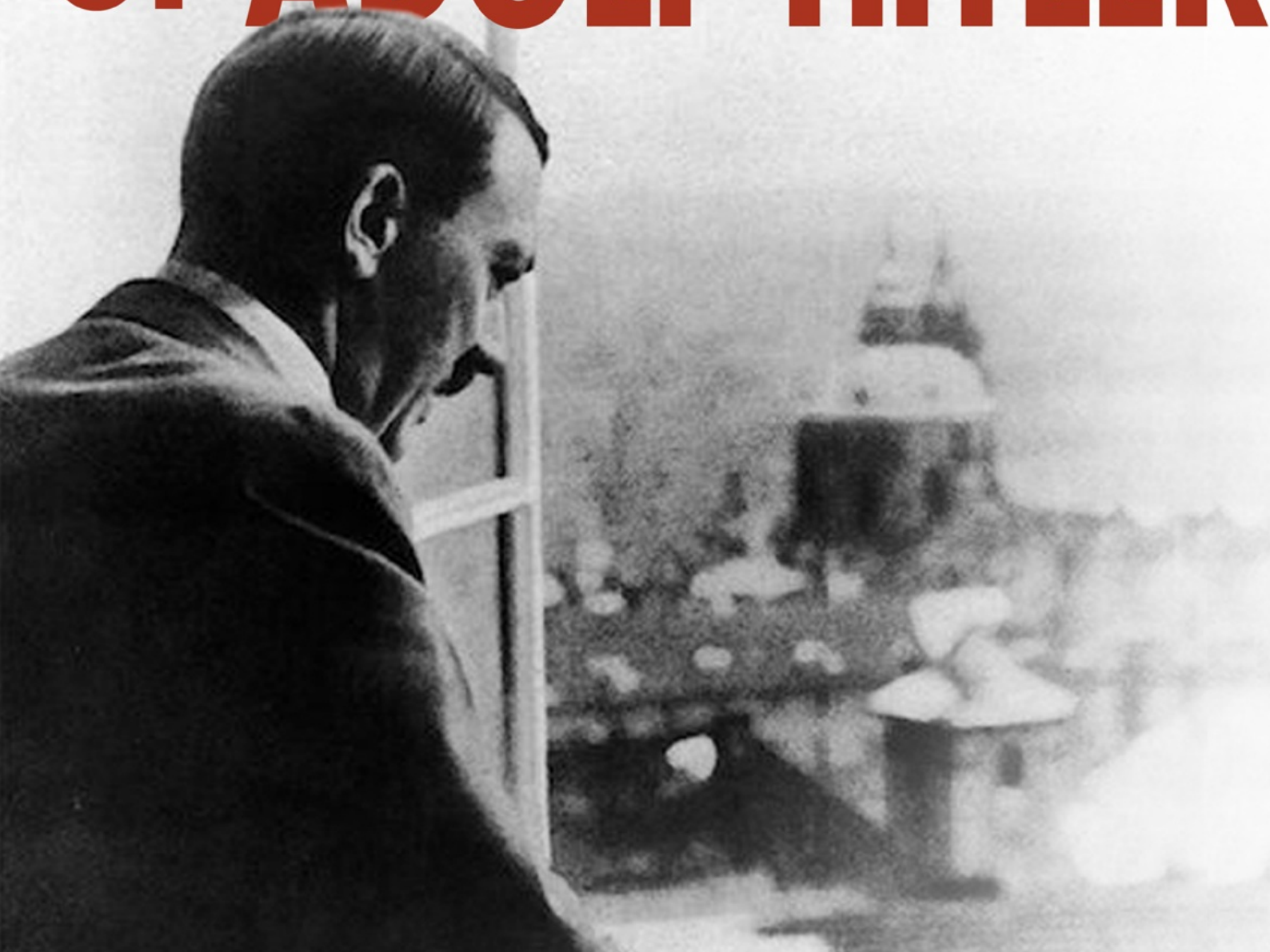


# THE RISE AND FALL OF ADOLF HITLER



**WILLIAM L. SHIRER**

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# The Rise and Fall of Adolf Hitler

William L. Shirer

The Rise and Fall of Adolf Hitler

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# **PART 1**

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## **THE RISE OF ADOLF HITLER**

# *Father and Son*

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One day when Adolf Hitler was only eleven years old he got into a violent quarrel with his father. The stern and stubborn parent was a retired customs official in Austria. He insisted that his son follow in his footsteps when he grew up. But the boy had already made up his mind that he wanted to be an artist. His father, he later recounted, was struck speechless by such an idea.

“Artist!” exclaimed the father. “No! Never as long as I live!”

Angry words flamed up between them. But the youth would not give in. He refused even to consider becoming a government official. The very idea of sitting in an office filling out forms, he said, made him sick to his stomach. He was determined to become a painter.

Hitler never became a painter, though he considered himself to be an “artist” to the end of his life. But this determined stand against his father at a time when he was only a boy in the sixth grade at school revealed a fierce, unbending will that was to carry him far in this world.

In fact, combined with other qualities, it carried him to a point where he became the dictator of Germany and then the conqueror of most of Europe. As a conqueror he belongs in history with Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar and Napoleon Bonaparte.

Like them he was undoubtedly a genius. But it must be added at once that he was an evil genius, one of the cruelest, most bloodthirsty and barbarous tyrants who ever lived. Perhaps it would be more accurate historically to say that Hitler was closer to Genghis Khan, the ruthless Asiatic conqueror, than to Alexander, Caesar and Napoleon.

Absolute power corrupted him, as it does all who hold it. Before he died at the age of fifty-six he had massacred millions of innocent persons, including some five million Jews. And he had plunged the world into the bloodiest and most destructive war in history.

We know much more about Hitler than we shall ever know about such illustrious predecessors of his as Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon and Genghis Khan. For one thing, he was a child of our time. Millions of persons still living remember him. Many of them suffered from his barbarous acts. For many years my own job, as an American correspondent in Berlin, gave me the opportunity to meet him, to listen to his numerous speeches and to observe him at first hand at the moment of his greatest triumphs.

Furthermore, at the end of World War II in 1945, the victorious Allies captured most of his secret papers. They were found in abandoned mines and in cellars of old castles where they had been hidden by the Germans. We can thus tear away the curtain that for so long hid his odious acts.

We can read his confidential letters. We can follow his secret talks to his generals and see him plotting war and conquest. We can watch him browbeating his victims, double-crossing his friends and enemies, ordering the murder of his opponents and the massacre of the millions he disliked.

Never before in history has there been such a well-documented story as this one. There is no need to invent or to imagine anything, as chroniclers of the lives of great men who lived

in the distant past sometimes have done. What is set down in this book is based almost entirely on Hitler's own records, or on what the author saw in Germany with his own eyes.

The story of the life of Adolf Hitler both fascinates and repels one. He rose literally from the gutter to become the greatest conqueror of the twentieth century. He overcame incredible obstacles in his rise to power. What he did with his power—how he abused it—we shall see.

# *School Days and an Interlude of Loafing*

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Adolf Hitler was born April 20, 1889, in a modest inn in the Austrian town of Braunau-on-the-Inn across the border from Germany.

Austria was a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which was ruled by the ancient and autocratic House of Hapsburgs, the oldest ruling family in Europe. This Austro-Hungarian Empire no longer exists. It was destroyed at the end of World War I (which it largely provoked) when the various nationalities that comprised it—the Poles, Czechoslovakians, Hungarians and Yugoslavs—broke away to form their own countries.

But at the time of Hitler's birth, eleven years before the end of the nineteenth century, Austria-Hungary was one of the most important empires in Europe. It sprawled along the Danube River in central and southeastern Europe. It had a large army and navy. It was economically prosperous. It had an extensive aristocracy made up of dukes, archdukes, princes, counts and barons, most of whom lived in beautiful castles or palaces.

The Austrians, though outnumbered by the other nationalities, dominated the empire. They were a branch of the Germanic people and spoke German. Many, like Hitler, thought of themselves as German. This must be kept in mind in tracing the career of the future German dictator. Though born an Austrian, he considered himself to be as good a German as those who lived in Germany. And he thought that all "Germans" should be united into one country—an objective he ultimately achieved for a short time.

His father, as we have seen, was a stern, short-tempered man. Adolf respected him but did not get along with him. His mother, as he often said later, he loved. She was a gentle, devoted woman, devoted to her husband and especially to her children.

Until Adolf came into conflict with his father, he too seems to have been a gentle and devout child. Indeed while attending elementary school at the Benedictine monastery of Lambach he became a choirboy and dreamed of becoming a Catholic priest.

At this school and at others his grades at first were quite good. But he claimed that his quarrels with his father over what he intended to be when he grew up caused him to lose interest in getting good marks. From the sixth grade on they became progressively worse. At the age of sixteen, when he was midway through secondary school, he became so discouraged that he quit school for good.

Forever after he blamed his teachers for his scholastic failure. "The majority of them," he wrote later when he had grown up, "were somewhat mentally deranged, and quite a few ended their lives as lunatics." To blame others for our failures is a common fault. But Hitler then—and later—carried it to extremes. He was always finding a scapegoat.

One of his teachers, he later admitted, did inspire him in his youth. This was Leopold Poetsch, who taught history at the secondary school. Young Adolf was carried away by his dazzling eloquence.

"You cannot imagine," Hitler once exclaimed years afterward, "how much I owe to that old man!"



Although Adolf was bored by most of the subjects he was forced to take, he developed passion for history. This was to help him in his ultimate career.

Hitler once described the three years after he quit school as the happiest days of his life. His father had died in the meantime, leaving his mother but a small pension to support herself and her two children, Adolf and a younger sister named Paula.

Adolf refused to get a job or to learn a trade, as most boys did when they quit school. Regular employment disgusted him—not only at the age of sixteen but throughout his life. He never once held a steady job until he became dictator of a great country.

Instead of working and trying to help his mother, he preferred to loaf. So for three years after he left school, from the age of sixteen to nineteen, he spent his time roaming the streets of Linz, a pleasant Austrian town on the Danube River, and dreaming of his future as an artist. Evenings he would often spend at the opera, for he also had a passion for music and especially for the mystic opera music of Richard Wagner, the great German composer.

A ticket for standing room at the opera cost him no more than the equivalent of ten cents. Nevertheless, attending the opera took most of his meager pocket money. The rest he spent on books, for he also read a great deal. Hours on end he would curl up with books on German history and mythology. He could not, of course, afford to buy these books. He borrowed them from lending libraries, which charged a small fee. There were no free public libraries in Austria in those days.

And he brooded. He became deeply concerned with the ills of the world. His one boyhood friend later recounted: “Hitler was always up against something and at odds with the world. I never saw him taking anything lightly.”

This friend has described young Adolf at this period as a pale, sickly, lanky youth who was usually shy and reticent. But he could also fly into sudden bursts of hysterical anger against those who disagreed with him.

We thus see forming in Hitler in his early teens some of the aspects of character and mind which later played a key roll in his life. He was at odds with the world and he angrily resented anyone disagreeing with him.

At eighteen, Hitler received a shattering blow from which he never entirely recovered. He flunked the entrance examination at the Vienna Academy of Fine Arts. His crude, lifeless drawings convinced the teachers who examined him that he would be wasting his time—and theirs—in trying to achieve his great ambition of becoming a painter.

This failure became one of Hitler’s major, lifelong frustrations. To the very end of his life he saw himself as an “artist” who had been denied recognition by “stupid” teachers.

Another terrible blow soon followed. The next year his beloved mother died of cancer just four days before the family would have celebrated Christmas. It was a sad Yuletide for the nineteen-year-old youth.

It was a dreadful blow [he wrote later]. I had honored my father, but my mother I had loved. Her death put a sudden end to all my high-flown plans. Poverty and hard reality compelled me to take a quick decision. I was faced with the problem of somehow making my own living.

Somehow! He had no trade. He had always disdained manual or office work. He had never tried to earn a cent. But he was undaunted. Bidding his relatives farewell, he declared that he would never return to his hometown of Linz until he had made good.

With a suitcase full of clothes and underwear in my hand [he later wrote of his departure] and an indomitable will in my heart, I set out for Vienna.

I too hoped to wrest from fate what my father had accomplished fifty years before. I too hoped to become “something”—but in no case a civil servant.

## *Down and Out in Vienna—“The Saddest Period of My Life”*

The next four years in Vienna, between 1909 and 1913, turned out to be a time of utter misery for Hitler.

This was the period when he was entering manhood—between the ages of twenty and twenty-four. Usually these are happy years. A young man is getting a start in life, and a beginnings are exciting. They bring fresh experiences, new problems and unexpected challenges that stimulate a youth to make the most of himself.

No city on earth was more congenial to get a start in than Vienna, the capital of the old Austro-Hungarian Empire. It was—and is—one of the most beautiful cities of Europe. It lies along the blue Danube River beneath the wooded hills of the Vienna Forest. There is a state atmosphere about the city, as befits a once imperial capital. It has wide, tree-lined boulevards, spacious parks, elegant public buildings, soaring church spires, and is dotted with many splendid old palaces.

In Hitler's time—as before and afterward—music filled the air. It was the music of the great composers who had lived there—Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert—and in the last Indian-summer years of the empire, the gay, haunting waltzes of Vienna's own beloved Johann Strauss.

The Viennese are the most attractive people I have ever known in Europe. They are gay. They find life worth living and they make the most of it. They like music. They like to dance, especially waltzes, which they originated. They like to meet with one another in coffeehouses and have good talk. They go often to the theater and they have a passion for the opera. They enjoy good food and wine. And when the times are difficult they like to dream of a better life.

But Hitler did not share in the gaiety or in the dreams of the Viennese, nor did he appreciate the beauty of the city. His years in Vienna he later called “the saddest period of my life.” It is easy to see why.

For one thing, he shunned regular employment. He preferred to putter about at odd jobs—shoveling snow, beating carpets and carrying bags outside a railroad station. Occasionally when he was desperate he worked as a building laborer, but not often for he hated such hard work. Without regular wages he was forced to live in what we would call flophouses. His clothes were shabby, his hair uncut, his face unshaved. He became a vagabond.

Contrary to a popular legend, Hitler was never a paper hanger or a house painter. He was too lazy to acquire those skills. He did eventually earn some money painting crude watercolor pictures for posters and advertisements. This satisfied his “artistic” ambitions to some extent, but not the requirements of his stomach.

It was truly a meager living [he wrote later] which never sufficed to appease even my daily hunger.

Hunger was then my faithful bodyguard; he never left me for a moment and partook of all I had. My life was a continuous struggle with this pitiless friend.

Anyone who saw the future German dictator on the streets of Vienna in those days mu

have thought he was what we Americans would call a bum. He was down and out, and I looked it.

And yet there is another side to this story of his vagabond days in Vienna. Unlike most of the tramps who plodded the streets with him, he neither smoked nor drank. Unlike them too, he read much. In fact, without much work to do, he spent most of his days and evenings devouring books and pondering them.

From the reading of books and from a firsthand experience of the seamy side of life, Hitler learned during these vagrant early years in Vienna almost all that he was to know throughout his life. He often said so himself.

Vienna [he wrote years afterward] was the hardest, most thorough school of my life. I had set foot in this town while still half a boy, and I left it a man, grown quiet and grave.

In this period there took shape within me a world picture and a philosophy which became the granite foundation of all my acts. In addition to what I then created, I have had to learn little; and I have had to alter nothing.

What, then, did Hitler learn as a down-and-out tramp in Vienna between the ages of twenty and twenty-four? What was the “world picture and philosophy” upon which he later based the awful deeds that nearly destroyed the world? It is of vital importance to know the answers to these questions. They explain a great deal of world history during the third and fourth decades of the twentieth century.

First, Hitler learned to glorify war and conquest. The finest thing men could do, he concluded, was to go to war and conquer foreign peoples. Peace, he decided, was a bad thing for mankind. It corrupted men and made them soft.

What about the millions of men who were killed in wars while still young? And the millions of others who were maimed—blinded for the rest of their lives or crippled by the loss of a leg or an arm? Hitler didn't much care. That was the way life was, he said—hard and cruel.

In his Vienna days Hitler also conceived the preposterous idea that the Germans were superior to all other peoples. They were, he was sure, stronger and more intelligent and more skillful than Americans or Britishers or Italians or Russians or others. In fact to him the Germans were the Master Race. Other people were fit only to be their slaves.

This was a widely held view among Germans in those days. And though Hitler was an Austrian, many Austrians, as we have said, considered themselves as German as the people who lived in Germany.

The young tramp in Vienna also absorbed a number of political ideas which he later put into practice in Germany. He saw that if a political party were to be successful it had to know how to attract millions of people. It had to master the art of propaganda, which, as he understood it, often meant telling lies to people. He once said that the bigger the lie the better, because it was easier to make people believe a big lie than a small one. Also, he came to believe that a political party must know how to use terror. That meant bashing in the heads of political opponents, or sometimes even killing them.

Finally, Hitler saw the value of oratory in politics. Only a man who could sway the masses of people by his eloquence, he came to believe, could succeed in politics.

The power that has always started the great religious and political avalanches in history rolling [he wrote later] has been the magic of the spoken word, and that alone.

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In this matter Hitler practiced what he preached. He became the greatest orator of his time on the continent of Europe. I myself listened to many of his speeches and perceived the magic of his spoken words. I saw him hold huge audiences in his spell. Only Winston Churchill in England was his equal. In America we had no orator in those days to match Hitler.

It was in Vienna, too, that Hitler developed his grotesque hatred for the Jews. In his book *My Struggle* (in German it is called *Mein Kampf*), Hitler claimed to remember the very day that, as he says, he became a confirmed anti-Semite—or hater of Jews. He was walking in Vienna when he suddenly encountered a man who looked strange to him because of his long black coat and side whiskers.

“Is this a Jew?” he says was his first thought. “But the longer I stared at this foreign face the more my first question assumed a new form: ‘Is this a German?’”

Wherever I went [Hitler continued the story] I began to see Jews, and the more I saw, the more sharply they became distinguished in my eyes from the rest of humanity. I grew sick to the stomach. I began to hate them. I became an anti-Semite.

He was to remain a blind and fanatical one to the end of his life. This prejudice against the Jews became with Hitler a terrible disease which led to the massacre of millions of innocent Jewish men, women and children. Quite a few other Germans were afflicted with this bigotry. But they were mostly unimportant persons. What is significant to this story is that after Hitler became the German dictator and had the power of life and death over millions of people, he allowed this diseased hatred of the Jews to get the upper hand in him. It drove him to wipe out half of the Jews of Europe.

In the spring of 1913, when he was twenty-four years old, Hitler left Vienna for Munich, Germany. In his autobiographical book he gives several reasons for this move, but not the most important one. He says he could not stand all the mixture of races in Vienna, especially the presence of “Jews—and more Jews.” He says his heart had always been in Germany.

But the principal reason he left Austria was to escape military service. For three years—since his twenty-first birthday—he had dodged it. Not, it appears, because he was a coward but simply because he loathed serving in the ranks with Jews.

When Hitler arrived in Munich he was still penniless. To everyone except himself he must have seemed a total failure. He had no friends, no family, no home, no job, no prospects.

He had, however, one thing: an unquenchable confidence that he would still make good. Just how, he did not yet know.

The coming of World War I in 1914 offered Hitler an escape from all the failures and frustrations of his personal life. It came, he later said, “as a deliverance from the distress that had weighed upon me during the days of my youth. I am not ashamed to say that I sank down on my knees and thanked Heaven.” He petitioned King Ludwig III of Bavaria for permission to serve in a Bavarian regiment and it was granted.

The war, which would bring death to millions of young men, brought for Adolf Hitler,

twenty-five, a new start in life.

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## *Fateful Decision: Hitler Goes into Politics*

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Like millions of other Germans, Adolf Hitler proved to be a brave and courageous soldier. Later some of his political opponents charged that he was a coward in combat. But that was not true. He served four years on the Western front in France as a dispatch runner in the First Company of the Sixteenth Bavarian Reserve Infantry Regiment. He was twice wounded and twice decorated for bravery with the Iron Cross. Despite this record his promotion as a soldier was slow. In four years at the front he rose only from private to corporal. What he later believed to be his military genius was not recognized by his superior officers in World War I.

Like millions of other Germans, too, Hitler could not accept Germany's military defeat by Great Britain, France and the United States in 1918. Like them, he embraced the legend that the German army had not been defeated on the battlefield but had been, as they said, "stabbed in the back" by the slackers at home. Hitler was sure that these "slackers" were mostly Jews and "red" pacifists.

Hitler's belief in this fraudulent legend led him to make the crucial decision of his life: to go into politics. We can pinpoint the exact moment of this move.

On the dark, autumn Sunday morning of November 10, 1918, a pastor came bearing unbelievable news for the wounded soldiers in a military hospital near Berlin. Among the soldiers was Hitler, who was recovering from temporary blindness suffered in a British gas attack a month before.

Kaiser Wilhelm II, the emperor of Germany, had abdicated and fled to neutral Holland, the pastor told them. A republic had been proclaimed in Berlin. On the following day, the pastor said, the German army would surrender to the Allies at Compiègne, in France. The war was lost. The pastor began to sob. So did the blinded Corporal Hitler.

I could stand it no longer [Hitler later recounted]. I groped my way back to the ward, threw myself on my bunk and dug my burning head into my pillow.

So it had been in vain... the two million dead. Had they died for this? So that a gang of wretched criminals could lay hands on the Fatherland?

There followed for him, Hitler later said, "terrible days and even worse nights.... Hatred grew in me for those responsible for this deed. Miserable and degenerate criminals!"

And then, he recalled, "my own fate became known to me. I decided to go into politics. This turned out to be a fateful decision—not only for Adolf Hitler but also for the world.

The prospects for a political career in Germany for this twenty-nine-year-old Austrian without friends or funds, were less than promising. Returning to civilian life, he had no trade or profession by which to earn a living. He had little schooling and no experience whatsoever in politics.

For a brief moment he realized how bleak his prospects were. "Nameless as I was, I did not possess," he wrote later, "the least basis for any useful political action." Nevertheless he had

an immense confidence in himself. He was sure an opportunity would appear, and soon it did.

Not wishing at twenty-nine, any more than when he was twenty, to get a steady job in civilian life, he contrived to stay on in the army. Here at least he was fed and clothed and given shelter. He was posted at Munich, which he now regarded as his second home. His assignment in the army was to spy on political parties which the defeated German generals suspected might be “subversive”—that is, communist or socialist or pacifist.

One day in September, 1919, Hitler received an order to take a look at a small political group in Munich that called itself the German Workers’ party. The generals were suspicious of all parties of workingmen.

He found a gathering of about twenty-five people in the back room of a beer hall. Hitler discerned nothing subversive about them. But neither did he see anything of importance about them. When the next day he received an invitation to join this tiny political party he says he “didn’t know whether to be angry or to laugh.”

And yet... there was something about the shabby men that attracted the man who had once been a down-and-out tramp in Vienna. They were his kind of people. Back in the army barracks he found himself facing what later he called “the hardest question of my life: should I join?” And then, he later wrote:

After two days of agonized pondering and reflection, I finally came to the conviction that I had to take this step. It was the most decisive resolve of my life.

Adolf Hitler was thereupon enrolled as the seventh member of the Committee of the German Workers’ party. It was from this small and insignificant organization that Hitler fashioned the Nazi Party and eventually made it by far the largest political party in Germany with millions of enthusiastic members.

How did he do it, he who had always shunned hard, regular work? To the surprise of a man who had come into contact with him, Hitler suddenly revealed a ferocious energy and drive. All the warped ideas which had been bubbling in his strange mind since the lonesome days of hunger in Vienna now found an outlet.

He soon proved to be a brilliant organizer and a shrewd propagandist. By what can only be termed an evil stroke of genius, he gave the Nazi movement a flag, a symbol, in the form of the ancient swastika cross. This hooked cross was to many the sign of Aryan (that is, non-Jewish) purity and supremacy. It soon took on a strange fascination for numbers of Germans who flocked under its banner.

Hitler founded a party army of so-called storm troopers, the *Sturmabteilung*, which became widely known as the “S.A.” Its brown-shirted toughs soon spread terror among Hitler’s political opponents. They broke up their meetings, gave them beatings and sometimes murdered them.

And perhaps most important of all, Hitler soon became a dazzling orator. During his vagabond days in Vienna he had perceived that all great political movements were sparked by “the magic of the spoken word, and by that alone.” But for years he did not know whether he himself had the makings of a great public speaker. He had no opportunity to put himself to the test.



One day in Munich, not long after joining the party, he got his big chance. He was scheduled to make a brief preliminary speech at a political rally of the German Workers' party. The main address was to be given by the party's president, who did not think much of his subordinate's oratory.

Hitler stole the show! "I spoke for thirty minutes," he later wrote. "And what previously had simply felt within me was now proved by reality. I could speak!" From then on he drew large audiences. Many came just to hear him orate. They often left the hall converted to Nazism.

By 1921, only two years after he joined the party as a "nameless" follower, Hitler had succeeded by shrewdness, ruthlessness and his prowess as a spellbinder in making himself absolute dictator of it. He changed the name of the party to the "National Socialist German Workers' party." (The term *Nazi* is an abbreviation of the first part of the German name for the party—*Nationalsozialistische*.) He assumed the title of *Führer*, or Leader. Everyone else in the party was subordinate to him.

These subordinate leaders who helped Hitler on the road to political power in Germany were an odd assortment. They included Captain Ernst Röhm, a tough, scar-faced professional army officer, and Hermann Göring, a famous fighter pilot during World War I and a drug addict. There was Dietrich Eckart, a drunken poet who had once been confined in a mental institution, and Rudolf Hess, a starry-eyed student at the University of Munich. There was Alfred Rosenberg, a confused Balt, who in 1917 had graduated from the University of Moscow and had nearly become a Russian Bolshevik before emigrating to Munich to become a German Nazi.

There was Gregor Strasser, a druggist, who became the number two man in the party; and Strasser's secretary, a bespectacled chicken farmer by the name of Heinrich Himmler. The latter rose to be head of the black-coated S.S., chief of the secret police (Gestapo) and one of the most sinister and powerful men in Europe. Julius Streicher was another early Nazi leader. A former schoolteacher, he soon earned the name of "the Jewbaiter of Nuremberg." I used to see him striding the streets of that ancient town brandishing a whip, which he used freely on Jews. Another important aide to Hitler in later years was Joseph Goebbels, a brilliant but deceitful propagandist and orator. At the beginning of the 1920s he was still a university student.

Such were the principal misfits who helped Adolf Hitler, himself a misfit, conquer Germany.

By the autumn of 1923 Hitler believed himself strong enough to attempt that conquest. He plotted to stage a revolt in Munich and bring down the German Republic, after which he would make himself dictator of Germany.

This first attempt to seize political power became known in history as Hitler's Beer Hall Putsch. It is a strange story.

# *The Beer Hall Putsch*

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History teaches us that no serious political revolution can have much chance of success unless the mass of people are ready for it. If they are miserable enough and desperate enough they may welcome a revolution whose leaders promise a way out of their troubles.

Toward the end of 1924 Adolf Hitler believed that events were ripe for an attempt to overthrow the German Republic. The fledgling Republic was only five years old, yet it seemed to be floundering. Politically, economically and socially Germany was in a mess. At the beginning of the year the French army had occupied the Ruhr, the industrial heart of Germany, because the German government had failed to meet its reparation payments called for under the Treaty of Versailles. The mines and the factories of the Ruhr, on which the life of Germany depended, had closed down. Millions of men were thrown out of work. Business was at a standstill.

But that was not all. German currency had ceased to have any value. The mark had originally been worth twenty-five cents. By November, 1923, it had dropped to a rate of four billion marks to the dollar. This meant that forty million marks were worth only one cent. The consequences were disastrous. The life savings of every family in the country were wiped out. Their salaries and wages had almost no purchasing power. They could scarcely buy enough food to keep a family alive.

No wonder that the German people were looking for someone to lead them out of this impossible situation. Adolf Hitler, always a supreme egotist, had no difficulty in convincing himself that he was the man to do it. Actually he was overestimating himself. His Nazi party was strong only in the state of Bavaria. Elsewhere in Germany it did not even exist, and in most of the country he was still unknown. Nevertheless, at the beginning of November, 1923, he decided to make his bid for the dictatorship of Germany.

On the evening of November 8, the thirty-four-year-old Nazi chief led his armed storm troopers into the Buergerbräukeller, a large beer hall on the outskirts of Munich. A political rally attended by three thousand supporters of the Bavarian government had already begun. It had been organized by three men who governed Bavaria: Gustav von Kahr, the state commissioner; General Otto von Lossow, the commander of the German armed forces in Bavaria; and Colonel Hans von Seisser, the head of the Bavarian state police.

Kahr was in the middle of his speech when a revolver shot was heard in the hall. Hitler had jumped up on a table and to attract attention had fired his pistol at the ceiling. Kahr paused in his address to see what the commotion was all about. He soon learned.

Hitler, surrounded by a squad of storm troopers brandishing rifles and revolvers, pushed his way to the platform and shoved Kahr aside.

“The national revolution,” Hitler shouted, “has begun!”

Next he herded the three government leaders into a small room off stage. Knowing that boldness is half the game in such situations, he pointed his revolver at them and commanded them to join his revolution.

Hitler was realist enough to know that he did not possess the armed strength to defeat the

German army troops and the Bavarian police. His strategy was not to beat them, but to win them over to his side by threats. A loaded pistol can be quite convincing. But it did not convince Kahr, General von Lossow and Colonel von Seisser. They refused to be intimidated. They declined to join Hitler's revolution.

In almost all crises of his life, Hitler showed a remarkable capacity for quick, cool thinking that outwitted his opponents. He showed it now.

Leaving the three stubborn government leaders in the room under armed guard, he dashed back to the hall and announced to the crowd that Kahr, Lossow and Seisser—the Bavarian triumvirate, as they were called—had joined him in forming a new national government for Germany. He himself, he said, would lead the government. General Erich Ludendorff, second only to Field Marshal von Hindenburg as a great hero of World War I, would become commander in chief of the new German army.

The big lie—or rather, the two big lies—worked.

The Bavarian triumvirate had not joined Hitler. Kahr, Lossow and Seisser were still locked up off stage for refusing to join him. But the crowd did not know this. The people applauded wildly. As for General Ludendorff, he knew nothing of the revolt and was not present.

But Hitler had sent for him. This was his ace in the hole. For some time the brash young politician had been cultivating the famous general of the old imperial army. Like most of the other generals and like Hitler, General Ludendorff despised the democratic Republic. Hitler's name meant nothing to the Germans outside of Bavaria. But Ludendorff's carried tremendous weight throughout the country.

The timely arrival of Ludendorff saved Hitler—for the time being. Though the General was furious with Hitler for launching a revolution without consulting him—and in a beer hall at that!—he offered to join it. He quickly won over Kahr, Lossow and Seisser, or thought he did. The three men were released and led back to the platform in triumph by Hitler. All five men made brief speeches and swore to support the new revolutionary government.

But proclaiming a revolution is only the first step, and that was as far as Hitler got. He had neglected to occupy the strategic centers of the city, which is really the first thing to do in a revolution. Not even the telegraph office was seized. Over its wires the news of the *Putsch* (the uprising was called in German) was flashed to Berlin. Orders from the capital came back immediately to suppress it.

Kahr, Lossow and Seisser needed no urging. They slipped out of the beer hall and gathered their forces—the troops and the police—to put down the rebellion. They proclaimed that the promises extorted from them at the point of Hitler's pistol were null and void. They ordered the Nazi party dissolved.

By dawn of November 9 Hitler realized that he had lost. He had planned to make a revolution *with* the army and police, not *against* them. He proposed to Ludendorff that they retire to the countryside.

The venerable general refused to retreat. He insisted that they march with their storm troopers to the center of Munich, take over the city and proclaim it the capital of the new revolutionary government. Ludendorff was confident that neither the troops nor the police would dare to oppose a war hero such as he was. Reluctantly Hitler agreed to go along.

Shortly after noon on November 9 the ragged column of storm troopers, with Ludendorff, Hitler and Goering in the lead, reached a narrow street in the center of Munich. There a detachment of police, about a hundred strong and armed with rifles, barred the way.

Which side fired first was never established. One eyewitness later testified that Hitler opened fire with his revolver when the police officer in charge refused to obey his order to surrender. At any rate, firing broke out. Within sixty seconds, sixteen Nazis and three policemen lay dead or dying. The rest of the revolutionists, including Adolf Hitler, lay clutching the pavement to save their lives.

All the rest except Ludendorff. He marched proudly between the muzzles of the police rifles until he reached the square beyond. He must have looked a lonely figure. Not one Nazi followed him—not even the Führer, Adolf Hitler.

The future dictator of Germany was, in fact, the first to scamper to safety. Unmindful of the comrades dead and dying (Goering lay on the pavement seriously wounded) Hitler picked himself up, leaped into a waiting car, and was driven to the country home of a Nazi, where he hid out for several days from the police.

To most people in Germany, this seemed to be the end of Hitler and Nazism. The Nazi party was dissolved. Its leaders were arrested for high treason. Its top man, who had run away at the first hail of bullets, seemed utterly discredited. His meteoric political career appeared to be finished.

As things turned out, it had only begun.

By a dazzling display of oratory, Hitler contrived to turn his trial for treason into a public platform from which he established himself for the first time as a national figure. In the eyes of millions of Germans who hated the Republic, he emerged as a patriot and hero. He acted as his own lawyer. And no one else in the courtroom could match his eloquence or his shrewdness in cross-examination. He completely dominated the trial—and the headlines of the world press.

Hitler was found guilty of high treason and sentenced on April 1, 1924, to five years imprisonment in the fortress of Landsberg. There he was treated as an honored guest and given a comfortable room of his own with a splendid view over the orchards of the adjoining countryside.

In such pleasant surroundings, the prisoner settled down to ponder his mistakes, to take stock of the future—dismal as that future seemed—and to dictate the text of a book.

Into this book the fallen Nazi leader began to pour the burning thoughts which were to shape the course of German history for the next two decades. He began to set down in detail the blueprint for the kind of Germany—and Europe—he intended to establish when destiny again called, as he was certain it would.

It was not Hitler's fault if the men who ruled the democratic German Republic and the statesmen who presided over the governments of the other countries in Europe did not read his book when it was published. Or, if they read it, did not take it seriously.

No one can say that Adolf Hitler did not give full warning of the barbarian world he intended to make.

# **PART 2**

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## **HITLER CONQUERS GERMANY**

## *A Revealing Book and a New Start*

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Adolf Hitler was released from Landsberg Prison five days before Christmas in 1924. Thanks to a Yuletide amnesty, he had had to serve less than a year of his five-year sentence for high treason. Though happy to be out of prison, he faced a bleak Christmas. His prospects seemed utterly hopeless.

The Nazi party, which he had built up from nothing, was banned. He himself was forbidden to speak in public. He was threatened with deportation from Germany to his native Austria.

It seemed to almost everyone in Germany that Hitler was finished. Even most of his staunchest supporters thought so. Foreign ambassadors in Berlin reported confidently to their governments that the flamboyant Nazi leader would soon be a forgotten man. To the millions of Germans who supported the democratic Republic, Hitler had turned out to be that worst of all failures—a joke. They still laughed when they recalled the comic-opera Beer Hall Putsch. They made fun of Hitler's "toothbrush" mustache, which resembled the one made famous by the great movie comedian, Charlie Chaplin.

But it was Hitler who eventually had the last laugh. He was not, as we have seen, a man who was easily discouraged. He picked up the threads of his life in his shabby two-room apartment in a run-down section of Munich. The contemplation of his misfortunes only strengthened his conviction that he had a great mission to perform. All great men, he said of himself, had their setbacks. Overcoming them only proved one's greatness.

In this spirit of renewed self-confidence he finished dictating the book he had begun in prison. He set down on paper for all to ponder the blueprint of what he believed the Almighty had called upon him to do in this world and the perverted philosophy that would sustain it.

Hitler wanted to call his book *Four and a Half Years of Struggle against Lies, Stupidity and Cowardice*. But Max Amann, who had been his top sergeant during the war and was now manager of the Nazi publishing business, rebelled. Such a long and ponderous title would never sell. He insisted on shortening it to *My Struggle—Mein Kampf*.

It became one of the most influential books of a demented age, and eventually it outsold all other books in Germany except the Bible. By 1933 its royalties had made author Hitler a millionaire.

In substance, *My Struggle* is an expansion of the half-baked ideas which Hitler picked up during his vagabond days in Vienna. These ideas had been matured by his experience as a soldier in World War I. Hitler brought them up to date and applied them to Germany's problems in the troubled 1920s. Let us try to sum them up.

Germany's first task, Hitler declared, was to recover from the humiliating defeat of 1918. He urged tearing up the Versailles Treaty, which the victorious Allies had imposed on the Germans after the war. This would free Germany from paying reparations and it would free her to rearm. Once Germany had a big army and navy again, she would become "lord of the earth." Those are Hitler's very words. He wanted Germany to become master of the world.

How could it reach this exalted position?

First, Hitler proposed, there must be a “final reckoning with France, the mortal enemy of the German people.” France, he declared, must be destroyed.

Then, with its rear in the West protected, Germany could turn to conquests in the East. The first targets would be those countries with large German minorities. These were his native Austria, and Czechoslovakia and Poland. After them would come the big prize.

The big prize was Russia. In his book, Hitler was quite frank about it. “If we speak of so in Europe to conquer,” he wrote, “we can have primarily in mind only Russia. This soil exists for the people which possesses the force to take it.”

He did not think it would be difficult for Germany to take Russia. The Soviet Union, he said, was “ripe for collapse.”

Can anyone contend that Hitler’s plans for the future—for a new world war—were not clear and precise? He would destroy France and then conquer the East.

During the later years when I was working in Berlin, I watched Hitler take one country after another. I used to wonder why the world was so surprised at this tyrant doing exactly what he had said in his book he would do. But until it was too late, few people believed him.

Not even Hitler’s fellow Germans believed him. His book gave full warning of what he would do to Germany if he came to power. He would, he boasted, destroy the Republic, abolish democracy, stamp out the workers’ free trade unions and establish himself as supreme dictator. Also, he added, he would “settle” with the Jews.

Finally, Hitler’s book was studded with gems of that warped philosophy which he had picked up as a tramp—though a well-read one—in Vienna. Unfortunately it was a philosophy which some of Germany’s most learned philosophers had taught during the nineteenth century. Hitler picked it up from reading them.

To us today such a philosophy seems utterly outlandish. But many Germans in Hitler’s time took it seriously. Consider a few typical examples from the Nazi leader’s book.

Mankind has grown great in eternal struggle, and only in eternal peace does it perish....

Nature confers the Master’s right on the strongest. They must dominate. They have the right to victory.

Those who do not want to fight in this world do not deserve to live. Even if this were hard—that is how it is!

With such barbaric ideas buzzing in his head, Hitler set out to rebuild the Nazi party and to plot new strategy and tactics for the conquest of Germany. The failure of the Beer Hall Putsch had taught him one lesson. There must be no further attempt at armed revolt.

Henceforth, he decided, the Nazi party would depend on votes to sweep it into power in Berlin. “We shall have to hold our noses and enter the Reichstag,” he told one of his cronies. The Reichstag was the popularly elected legislative body of Germany, equivalent to our House of Representatives.

Two weeks after his release from prison Hitler promised the state government of Bavaria that if it lifted the ban on the Nazis, the party would restrict itself to going after votes in a peaceful, democratic manner. The ban was lifted. But Hitler did not keep his word for long.

On February 27, 1925, he addressed the first mass meeting of the reborn Nazi party at the Buergerbräukeller. This was the big beer hall which he and his followers had last seen on the

morning they set out on their ill-fated march to take over Munich and overthrow the Republic.

Carried away by the enthusiasm of the crowd and by his own eloquence, Hitler threatened the state with a new wave of Nazi violence. The Bavarian government promptly forbade him to speak again in public. The ban was also applied by the other states in Germany and lasted two years.

This was a heavy blow to a man whose brilliant oratory had brought him so far. A silenced Hitler was a defeated Hitler. Or so most people in Germany thought.

But again they were wrong. They forgot that Hitler was an organizer as well as a spellbinder. Curbing his resentment at being forbidden to make speeches, the Nazi chief set to work with furious energy to make the Nazi party a political organization such as Germany had never known. It would be, he decided, like the army—a state within a state. That would make it all the easier to take over the nation when the time came.

“We recognized,” Hitler said later of this period, “that it is not enough to overthrow the old state. A new state must previously have been built up.”

And that is what he did.

Progress was slow at first. Prosperity had finally come to Germany in 1925, as it had to a part of the Western world. With better times there was a general feeling of relaxation after so many years of war and turmoil and hunger.

This was not the kind of soil in which a revolutionary movement such as nazism could thrive. By the end of 1925, Hitler had attracted only twenty-seven thousand dues-paying party members. By the end of 1928, after four years of hard work, the membership had risen only by four times. But in the national elections that year the Nazis polled fewer than one million votes out of thirty-one million cast. They elected only 12 of the Reichstag's 491 members.

The period from 1925 until the coming of the world-wide depression in 1929 was thus a lean one for Hitler politically, though he never lost hope of eventual victory. But so far as his private life was concerned these years, as he later said, were among the best of his life.

For the first and last time, he fell deeply in love.



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