

## NAZISM

The National Socialist German Workers' Party almost died one morning in 1919. It numbered only a few dozen grumblers' it had no organization and no political ideas. But many among the middle class admired the Nazis' muscular opposition to the Social Democrats. And the Nazis themes of patriotism and militarism drew highly emotional responses from people who could not forget Germany's prewar imperial grandeur.

In the national elections of September 1930, the Nazis garnered nearly 6.5 million votes and became second only to the Social Democrats as the most popular party in Germany. In Northeim, where in 1928 Nazi candidates had received 123 votes, they now polled 1,742, a respectable 28 percent of the total. The nationwide success drew even faster... in just three years, party membership would rise from about 100,000 to almost a million, and the number of local branches would increase tenfold. The new members included working-class people, farmers, and middle-class professionals. They were both better educated and younger than the Old Fighters, who had been the backbone of the party during its first decade. The Nazis now presented themselves as the party of the young, the strong, and the pure, in opposition to an establishment populated by the elderly, the weak, and the dissolute.

Hitler was born in a small town in Austria in 1889. As a young boy, he showed little ambition. After dropping out of high school, he moved to Vienna to study art, but he was denied the chance to join Vienna academy of fine arts. When WWI broke out, Hitler joined Kaiser Wilhelmer's army as a Corporal. He was not a person of great importance. He was a creature of a Germany created by WWI, and his behavior was shaped by that war and its consequences. He had emerged from Austria with many prejudices, including a powerful prejudice against Jews. Again, he was a product of his times... for many Austrians and Germans were prejudiced against the Jews.

In Hitler's case the prejudice had become maniacal it was a dominant force in his private and political personalities. Anti-Semitism was not a policy for Adolf Hitler--it was religion. And in the Germany of the 1920s, stunned by defeat, and the ravages of the Versailles treaty, it was not hard for a leader to convince millions that one element of the nation's society was responsible for most of the evils heaped upon it. The fact is that Hitler's anti-Semitism was self-inflicted obstacle to his political success. The Jews, like other Germans, were shocked by the discovery that the war had not been fought to a standstill, as they were led to believe in November 1918, but that Germany had , in fact, been defeated and was to be treated as a vanquished country. Had Hitler not embarked on his policy of disestablishing the Jews as Germans, and later of exterminating them in Europe, he could have counted on their loyalty. There is no reason to believe anything else.

On the evening of November 8, 1923, Gyula Gömbös State Councillor Gustav Ritter von Kahr was making a political speech in Munich's sprawling Bürgerbräukeller, some 600 Nazis and right-wing sympathizers surrounded the beer hall. Hitler burst into the building and leaped onto a table, brandishing a revolver and firing a shot into the ceiling. "The National Revolution," he cried, "has begun!" At that point, informed that fighting had broken out in another part of the city, Hitler rushed to that scene. His prisoners were allowed to leave, and they talked about organizing defenses against the Nazi coup. Hitler was of course furious. And he was far from finished. At about 11 o'clock on the morning of November 9--the anniversary of the founding of the German Republic in 1919--3,000 Hitler partisans again gathered outside the Bürgerbräukeller.

To this day, no one knows who fired the first shot. But a shot rang out, and it was followed by fusillades from both sides. Hermann Göring fell wounded in the thigh and both legs. Hitler flattened himself against the pavement; he was unhurt. General Ludendorff continued to march stolidly toward the police line, which parted to let him pass through (he was later arrested, tried and acquitted). Behind him, 16 Nazis and three policemen lay sprawled dead among the many wounded.

The next year, Röhm and his band joined forces with the fledgling National Socialist Party in Adolf Hitler's Munich Beer Hall Putsch. Himmler took part in that uprising, but he played such a minor role that he escaped arrest. The Röhm-Hitler alliance survived the Putsch, and Röhm's 1,500-man band grew into the Sturmabteilung, the SA, Hitler's brown-shirted private army, that bullied the Communists and Democrats. Hitler recruited a handful of men to act as his bodyguards and protect him from Communist toughs, other rivals, and even the S.A. if it got out of hand. This tiny group was the embryonic SS.

In 1933, after the Nazi Party had taken power in Germany, increasing trouble with the SA made a showdown inevitable. As German Chancellor, the Führer could no longer afford to tolerate the disruptive Brownshirts; under the ambitious Röhm, the SA had grown to be an organization of three million men, and its unpredictable activities prevented Hitler from consolidating his shaky control of the Reich. He had to dispose of the SA to hold the support of his industrial backers, to satisfy party leaders jealous of the SA's power, and most important, to win the allegiance of the conservative Army generals. Under pressure from all sides, and enraged by an SA plot against him that Heydrich had conveniently uncovered, Hitler turned the SS loose to purge its parent organization. They were too uncontrollable even for Hitler. They went about their business of terrorizing Jews with no mercy. But that is not what bothered Hitler, since the SA was so big, (3 million in 1933) and so out of control, Hitler sent his trusty comrade Josef Dietrich, commander of a SS bodyguard regiment to murder the leaders of the SA.

The killings went on for two days and nights and took a toll of perhaps 200 "enemies of the state." It was quite enough to

reduce the SA to impotence, and it brought the Führer immediate returns. The dying President of the Reich, Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg, congratulated Hitler on crushing the troublesome SA, and the Army generals concluding that Hitler was now their pawn--swore personal loyalty to him.

In April 1933, scarcely three months after Adolf Hitler took power in Germany, the Nazis issued a degree, ordering the compulsory retirement of "non-Aryans" from the civil service. This edict, petty in itself, was the first spark in what was to become the Holocaust, one of the most ghastly episodes in the modern history of mankind. Before he campaign against the Jews was halted by the defeat of Germany, something like 11 million people had been slaughtered in the name of Nazi racial purity. The Jews were not the only victims of the Holocaust. Millions of Russians, Poles, gypsies and other "subhumans" were also murdered. But Jews were the favored targets--first and foremost.

It took the Nazis some time to work up to the full fury of their endeavor. In the years following 1933, the Jews were systematically deprived by law of their civil rights, of their jobs and property. Violence and brutality became a part of their everyday lives. Their places of worship were defiled, their windows smashed, their stores ransacked. Old men and young were pummeled and clubbed and stomped to death by Nazi jack boots. Jewish women were accosted and ravaged, in broad daylight, on main thoroughfares.

Some Jews fled Germany. But most, with a kind of stubborn belief in God and Fatherland, sought to weather the Nazi terror. It was forlorn hope. In 1939, after Hitler's conquest of Poland, the Nazis cast aside all restraint. Jews in their millions were now herded into concentration camps, there to starve and perish as slave laborers. Other millions were driven into dismal ghettos, which served as holding pens until the Nazis got around to disposing of them.

The mass killings began in 1941, with the German invasion of the Soviet Union. Nazi murder squads followed behind the Wehrmacht enthusiastically slaying Jews and other conquered peoples. Month by month the horrors escalated. First tens of thousands, then hundreds of thousands of people were led off to remote fields and forest to be slaughtered by SS guns. Assembly-line death camps were established in Poland and train loads of Jews were collected from all over occupied Europe and sent to their doom. At some of the camps, the Nazis took pains to disguise their intentions until the last moment. At others, the arriving Jews saw scenes beyond comprehension. "Corpses were strewn all over the road," recalled one survivor. "Starving human skeletons stumbled toward us. They fell right down in front of our eyes and lay there gasping out their last breath." What had begun as a mean little edict against Jewish civil servants was now ending the death six million Jews, Poles, gypsies, Russians, and other "sub-humans" Uncounted thousands of Jews and other hapless concentration-camp inmates were used as guinea pigs in a wide range of medical and scientific experiments, most of them of little value.

Victims were infected with typhus to see how different geographical groups reacted; to no one's surprise, all groups perished swiftly. Fluids from diseased animals were injected into humans to observe the effect. Prisoners were forced to exist on sea water to see how long castaways might survive. Gynecology was an area of interest. Various methods of sterilization were practiced--by massive X-ray, by irritants and drugs, by surgery without benefit of anesthetic. As techniques were perfected, it was determined that a doctor with 10 assistants could sterilize 1,000 women per day.

The "experimental people" were also used by Nazi doctors who needed practice performing various operations. One doctor at Auschwitz perfected his amputation technique on live prisoners. After he had finished, his maimed patients were sent off to the gas chamber. A few Jews who had studied medicine were allowed to live if they assisted the SS doctors. "I cut the flesh of healthy young girls," recalled a Jewish physician who survived at terrible cost. "I immersed the bodies of dwarfs and cripples in calcium chloride (to preserve them), or had them boiled so the carefully prepared skeletons might safely reach the Third Reich's museums to justify, for future generations, the destruction of an entire race. I could never erase these memories from my mind."

But the best killing machine were the "shower baths" of death. After their arrival at a death camp, the Jews who had been chosen to die at once were told that they were to have a shower. Filthy by their long, miserable journey, they sometimes applauded the announcement. Countless Jews and other victims went peacefully to the shower rooms--which were gas chambers in disguise. In the anterooms to the gas chambers, many of the doomed people found nothing amiss. At Auschwitz, signs in several languages said, "Bath and Disinfectant," and inside the chambers other signs admonished, "Don't forget your soap and towel." Unsuspecting victims cooperated willingly. "They got out of their clothes so routinely," Said a Sobibor survivor. "What could be more natural?"

In time, rumors about the death camps spread, and underground newspapers in the Warsaw ghetto even ran reports that told of the gas chambers and the crematoriums. But many people did not believe the storied, and those who did were helpless in any case. Facing the guns of the SS guards, they could only hope and pray to survive. As one Jewish leader put it, "We must be patient and a miracle will occur." There were no miracles. The victims, naked and bewildered, were shoved into a line. Their guards ordered them forward, and flogged those who hung back. The doors to the gas chambers were locked behind them. It was all over quickly. The war came home to Germany. Scarcely had Hitler recovered from the shock of the July 20 bombing when he was faced with the loss of France and Belgium and of great conquests in the East. Enemy troops in overwhelming numbers were converging on the Reich.

By the middle of August 1944, the Russian summer offensives,

beginning June 10 and unrolling one after another, had brought the Red Army to the border of East Prussia, bottled up fifty German divisions in the Baltic region, penetrated to Vyborg in Finland, destroyed Army Group Center and brought an advance on this front of four hundred miles in six weeks to the Vistula opposite Warsaw, while in the south a new attack which began on August 20 resulted in the conquest of Rumania by the end of the month and with it the Floesti oil fields, the only major source of natural oil for the German armies. On August 26 Bulgaria formally withdrew from the war and the Germans began to hastily clear out of that country. In September Finland gave up and turned on the German troops which refused to evacuate its territory.

In the West, France was liberated quickly. In General Patton, the commander of the newly formed U.S. Third Army, the Americans had found a tank general with the dash and flair of Rommel in Africa. After the capture of Avranches on July 30, he had left Brittany to wither on the vine and begun a great sweep around the German armies in Normandy, moving southeast to Orleans on the Loire and then due east toward the Seine south of Paris. By August 23 the Seine was reached southeast and northwest of the capital, and two days later the great city, the glory of France, was liberated after four years of German occupation when General Jacques Leclerc's French 2nd Armored Division and the U.S. 4th Infantry Division broke into it and found that French resistance units were largely in control.