

Adolf Hitler

Introduction

The dictator of Nazi Germany, Adolf Hitler, was born on April 20, 1889, at Braunau am Inn, Austria-Hungary. His father, Alois (born 1837), was illegitimate and for a time bore his mother's name, Schicklgruber, but by 1876 he had established his claim to the surname Hitler. Adolf never used any other name, and the name Schicklgruber was revived only by his political opponents in Germany and Austria in the 1930s.

Early life

Adolf Hitler spent most of his childhood in the neighbourhood of Linz, the capital of Upper Austria, after his father's retirement from the Habsburg customs service. Alois Hitler died in 1903 but left an adequate pension and savings to support his wife and children. Adolf received a secondary education and, although he had a poor record at school and failed to secure the usual certificate, did not leave until he was 16 (1905). There followed two idle years in Linz, when he indulged in grandiose dreams of becoming an artist without taking any steps to prepare for earning his living. His mother was overindulgent to her willful son, and even after her death in 1908 he continued to draw a small allowance with which at first he maintained himself in Vienna. His ambition was to become an art student, but he twice failed to secure entry to the Academy of Fine Arts. For some years he lived a lonely and isolated life, earning a precarious livelihood by painting postcards and advertisements and drifting from one municipal lodging house to another.

Hitler already showed traits that characterized his later life: inability to establish ordinary human relationships; intolerance and hatred both of the established bourgeois world and of non-German peoples, especially the Jews; a tendency toward passionate, denunciatory outbursts; readiness to live in a world of fantasy and so to escape his poverty and failure.

In 1913 Hitler moved to Munich. Temporarily recalled to Austria to be examined for military service (February 1914), he was rejected as unfit; but when World War I broke out he volunteered for the German army and joined the 16th Bavarian Reserve Infantry Regiment. He served throughout the war, was wounded in October 1916, and was gassed two years later. He was still hospitalized when the war ended. Except when hospitalized, he was continuously in the front line as a headquarters runner; his bravery in action was rewarded with the Iron Cross, Second Class, in December 1914, and the Iron Cross, First Class (a rare decoration for a corporal), in August 1918. He greeted the war with enthusiasm, as a great relief from the frustration and aimlessness of his civilian life. He found comradeship, discipline, and participation in conflict intensely satisfying and was confirmed in his belief in authoritarianism, inequality, and the heroic virtues of war.

Rise to power

Discharged from the hospital in the atmosphere of confusion that followed the German defeat, Hitler determined to take up political work in order to destroy a peace settlement that he denounced as intolerable. He remained on the roster of his regiment until April 1920 and as an army political agent joined the tiny German Workers' Party in Munich (September 1919).

In 1920 he was put in charge of the party's propaganda and left the army to devote his time to building up the party, which in that year was renamed the National-sozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (of which Nazi was an abbreviation). Conditions were ripe for the development of such a party. Resentment at the loss of the war and the peace terms added to economic chaos brought widespread discontent. This was sharpened in Bavaria, where Hitler lived throughout the 1920s, by traditional separatism and dislike of the republican government in Berlin. In March 1920 a coup d'état by the army established a strong right-wing government. Munich became the gathering place for dissatisfied former servicemen and members of the Freikorps, which had been organized in 1918-19

from units of the German army unwilling to return to civilian life, and for political plotters against the republic. Many of these joined the Nazi Party. Foremost among them was Ernst Röhm, a member of the staff of the district army command, who had actually joined the German Workers' Party before Hitler and who was of great help in furthering his schemes for developing it into an instrument of power. It was he who recruited the "strong arm" squads used by Hitler to protect party meetings, to attack Socialists and Communists, and to exploit violence for the impression of strength it gave. In 1921 these were formally organized under Röhm into a private party army, the SA (Sturmabteilung). Röhm was also able to ensure the protection of the Bavarian government, which depended on the local army command for the maintenance of order and which tacitly accepted his breaches of law and his policy of intimidation.

Although conditions were thus favourable to the growth of the party, only Hitler was sufficiently astute to take full advantage of them. When he joined the party he found it small, ineffective, committed to a program of nationalist and socialist principles but uncertain of its aims and divided in its leadership. He accepted its program but regarded it only as a means to an end--political power. His propaganda methods and his personal arrogance caused friction with the other members of the committee, which was resolved when Hitler countered their attempts to curb his freedom by offering his resignation. Aware that the future of the party depended on his power to organize publicity and to acquire funds, they were forced to give in, and in July 1921 he became president with unlimited powers. From the first he set out to create a mass movement, whose mystique and force would be sufficient to bind its members in loyalty to him. He engaged in unrelenting propaganda through the party newspaper, the *Völkischer Beobachter* ("Popular Observer," acquired in 1920), and through a succession of meetings, rapidly growing from audiences of a handful to thousands, where he developed his unique talent for magnetism and mass leadership. At the same time, he gathered around him several of the Nazi leaders who later became infamous -- Alfred Rosenberg, Rudolf Hess, Hermann Göring, and Julius Streicher.

The climax in this rapid growth of the Nazi party in Bavaria came in an attempt to seize power in the Munich (Beer Hall) Putsch of November 1923, when Hitler and Gen. Erich Ludendorff took advantage of the prevailing lawlessness and opposition to the Weimar Republic to force the leaders of the Land government and the local Reichswehr commander to proclaim a national revolution. When released, however, they rescinded the proclamation. When placed on trial, Hitler, although his part in the Putsch had been far from glorious, characteristically took advantage of the immense publicity afforded to him. He also drew a vital lesson from the Putsch--that the movement must achieve power by legal means. He was sentenced to prison for five years. but served only nine months, and that in comfort at Landsberg. He used the time to prepare the first volume of *Mein Kampf*.

Hitler's ideas included little that cannot be traced to earlier writers or to the commonly accepted shibboleths of Viennese right-wing radicalism in his youth. He regarded inequality between races and individuals as part of an unchangeable natural order and exalted the "Aryan race" as the sole creative element of mankind. The natural unit of mankind was the Volk, of which the German was the greatest; and the state only existed to serve the Volk--a mission that the Weimar Republic betrayed. All morality and truth was judged by this criterion: whether it was in accordance with the interest and preservation of the Volk. For this reason democratic government stood doubly condemned. It assumed an equality within the Volk that did not in fact exist, and it supposed that what was in the interests of the Volk could be decided by discussion and voting. In fact the unity of the Volk found its incarnation in the Führer, endowed with absolute authority. Below the Führer the party (which Hitler often called the "movement" to distinguish it from democratic parties) was drawn from the best elements of the Volk and was in turn its safeguard.

The greatest enemy of Nazism was not, in Hitler's view, liberal democracy, which was already on the verge of collapse. It was rather the rival Weltanschauung, Marxism (which for him embraced Social Democracy as well as Communism), with its insistence on internationalism and class conflict. Behind Marxism he saw the greatest enemy of all, the Jew, who was for Hitler the very incarnation of evil, a mythical figure into which he projected all that he feared and hated.

During Hitler's absence in prison the Nazi Party disintegrated through internal dissension. In the task of reconstruction after his release, he faced difficulties that had not existed before 1923. Economic stability had been achieved by currency reform and the Dawes Plan; the republic had become more respectable. Hitler was forbidden to make speeches, first in Bavaria, then in many other German states (these prohibitions remained in force until 1927-28). Nevertheless, the party grew slowly in numbers, and in 1926 Hitler successfully established his position against Gregor Strasser, who had built up a rival Nazi movement in north Germany.

The slump of 1929 opened a new period of economic and political instability. Hitler made an alliance with the Nationalist Alfred Hugenberg in a campaign against the Young Plan. Through it Hitler was able for the first time to reach a nationwide audience with the help of Hugenberg's Nationalist Party organization and the newspapers it controlled. It also enabled him to commend himself as a gifted agitator to the magnates of business and industry who controlled political funds and were anxious to use them to establish a strong right-wing, anti-working-class government. The subsidies he received from the industrialists placed his party on a secure financial footing and enabled him to make effective his emotional appeal to the lower middle class and the unemployed, based on the proclamation of his faith that Germany would awaken from its sufferings to reassert its natural greatness. Like his later intrigues with the conservatives, Hitler's dealings with Hugenberg and the industrialists exemplify his skill in using those who sought to use him.

Mass agitation and unremitting propaganda, set against the failure of the government to achieve any success in internal or external affairs, produced a steadily mounting electoral strength for the Nazis, who became the second largest party in the country, with more than 6,000,000 votes at the 1930 election. Hitler opposed Hindenburg in the presidential election of 1932, capturing 36.8 percent of the votes on the second ballot.

Placed in a very strong position by his unprecedented mass following, he took part in a series of intrigues for the favour of the aging president in which the other principal participants were Franz von Papen, Gen. Kurt von Schleicher, Otto Meissner, and Hindenburg's son, Oskar. In spite of a decline in the party's votes in November 1932, he held to the chancellorship as the only office he would accept, and this by constitutional, not revolutionary, methods. Throughout, he showed a unique ability to exploit conditions favourable to success. He created the Hitler myth; he propagated it by every device of mass agitation and with an actor's ability to be absorbed in the role that he created for himself. Yet all the time he remained a shrewd and calculating politician, aware of the weaknesses of his own position, perceiving more quickly than anyone else how a situation could best be turned to his own advantage. In January 1933 he reaped his reward when Hindenburg invited him to be chancellor of Germany, and he took office with the support of Papen and Hugenberg and with Field Marshal Werner von Blomberg as minister of defense.

Hitler's personal life had grown more relaxed and stable with the added comfort that accompanied the success of the party. After his release from prison, he went to live on the Obersalzberg, near Berchtesgaden. His income at this time was derived in a haphazard manner from party funds and from writing in nationalist newspapers. When he became chancellor he accepted the material comforts that followed but remained independent of them. He was indifferent to clothes and food, never smoking or drinking tea, coffee, or alcohol. He continued, even as Führer, to rebel against routine or regular work--a characteristic that he ascribed to his artistic temperament.

When he went to live at Berchtesgaden, his half sister Angela Raubal and her two daughters accompanied him. Hitler became devoted to one of them, Geli, but his possessive jealousy drove her to suicide in September 1931. For weeks Hitler was inconsolable. Later Eva Braun, a shop assistant from Munich, became his mistress. Hitler rarely allowed her to come to Berlin or appear in public with him and would not consider marriage on the grounds that it would hamper his career. Eva was a warmhearted girl with no intellectual ability. Her great virtue in Hitler's eyes was her unquestioning loyalty, and in recognition of this he made her his legal wife at the end of his life.

Dictator, 1933-39

Once in power, Hitler proceeded to establish an absolute dictatorship. He secured the President's assent for new elections on the grounds that a majority in the Reichstag could not, after all, be obtained. The Reichstag fire, on the night of February 27, 1933 (apparently the work of a Dutch Communist, Marinus van der Lubbe), provided an excuse for a decree overriding all guarantees of freedom and for an intensified campaign of violence. In these conditions, when the elections were held (March 5), the Nazis polled 43.9 percent of the votes. The Reichstag assembled in the Potsdam Garrison Church, a theatrical gathering designed by Hitler to show the unity of his own movement with the old conservative Germany, represented by Hindenburg. Two days later an enabling bill, giving full powers to Hitler, was passed in the Reichstag by the combined votes of Nazi, Nationalist, and Centre party deputies (March 23, 1933).

Thus far successful, Hitler had no desire to carry too far a radical revolution. Conciliation was still necessary if he was to succeed to the presidency and retain the support of the army; nor had he ever intended to disappropriate the leaders of industry, provided they served the interests of the Nazi state. Ernst Röhm was the chief protagonist of the "continuing revolution"; he was also, as head of the SA, greatly distrusted by the army. Hitler tried first to secure Röhm's support for his policies by persuasion and by giving him government office but failed to win him over. Göring and Heinrich Himmler were eager to remove Röhm, but Hitler hesitated until the last moment. Finally, on June 29, 1934, he reached his decision. Röhm and his lieutenant Edmund Heines were executed without trial, together with Gregor Strasser, Schleicher, and others. The army leaders, satisfied at seeing the SA broken up, approved Hitler's actions. When Hindenburg died, on August 2, they, together with Papen, assented to the merging of the chancellorship and the presidency--with which went the supreme command of the armed forces of the Reich--and officers and men took an oath of allegiance to Hitler personally. Economic recovery and a reduction in unemployment (coincident with world recovery, but for which Hitler took credit) made the regime more acceptable, and a combination of success and terrorism brought the support of 90 percent of the voters in a plebiscite.

In power, Hitler devoted little attention to the organization and running of the domestic affairs of the Nazi state. Responsible for the broad lines of policy, as well as for the system of terror that upheld the state, he left detailed

administration to his subordinates. Each of these exercised arbitrary power in his own sphere, but, by deliberately creating offices and organizations with overlapping authority, Hitler effectively prevented any one of these private empires from ever becoming sufficiently strong to challenge his own absolute authority.

Foreign policy claimed his greater interest. His objectives were laid down in *Mein Kampf*, and Hitler worked toward them with consummate skill. He had early admired the pan-Germanism of the Austrian Georg Ritter von Schönerer, and the reunion of the German peoples was his first ambition. Beyond that, the natural field of expansion lay eastward, in Poland, the Ukraine, and the U.S.S.R.--expansion that would necessarily involve renewal of Germany's historic conflict with the Slav peoples, who would be subordinate in the new order to the Teutonic master race. He regarded Fascist Italy as a natural ally in this crusade against Bolshevism, provided its rivalry with Germany in central Europe could be overcome, and was ready to abandon the Germans of the Tirol to this end. Britain was a possible ally, provided it abandoned its traditional policy of maintaining the balance of power in Europe and limited itself to its interests overseas. France alone in the west was the natural enemy of Germany and must, therefore, be subdued to make expansion eastward possible.

Before such expansion was possible, it was necessary to remove the restrictions placed on Germany by the Treaty of Versailles. Hitler used all the arts of propaganda to allay the suspicions of the other powers. He posed as the champion of Europe against the scourge of Bolshevism and insisted that he was a man of peace who wished only to remove the inequalities of the Versailles Treaty. Germany withdrew from the Disarmament Conference and from the League of Nations (October 1933), but Hitler hastened to sign a nonaggression treaty with Poland (January 1934). Every repudiation of the treaty was followed by an offer to negotiate a fresh agreement and insistence on the limited nature of Germany's ambitions. Only once did he overreach himself: when the Austrian Nazis, with the connivance of the German embassy, murdered Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss of Austria and attempted a coup d'etat (July 1934). The attempt failed, and as Mussolini moved troops to the frontier, Hitler disclaimed all responsibility and sacrificed those who had acted with his sanction. In January 1935 a plebiscite in the Saarland returned that territory to Germany, and Hitler took the opportunity to renounce any further claims on France. In March of the same year, he announced

the introduction of conscription, and, although this provoked the united opposition of Britain, France, and Italy at the Stresa Conference, his peace propaganda was sufficiently successful to persuade the British to negotiate a naval treaty (June 1935) recognizing Germany's right to rearm. His greatest stroke came in March 1936, when he used the excuse of a pact between France and the Soviet Union to remilitarize the Rhineland--a decision that he took against the advice of his own general staff. Meanwhile, the alliance with Italy, foreseen in *Mein Kampf*, rapidly became a reality as a result of the sanctions imposed by Britain and France against Italy in the Ethiopian war. In October 1936 the Rome-Berlin axis was established; shortly afterward came the Anti-Comintern Pact with Japan; and these two were linked a year later. (see also Index: Axis Powers)

By 1937-38 a new stage had been reached. In November 1937 Hitler outlined his plans of future conquest (beginning with Austria and Czechoslovakia) to a secret meeting of his military leaders. He now dispensed with the services of those who were not wholehearted in their acceptance of Nazi dynamism--Hjalmar Schacht, who declared Germany's further rearmament a danger to its economy; Werner von Blomberg and Werner von Fritsch, representatives of the caution of professional soldiers; and Konstantin von Neurath, Hindenburg's appointment at the foreign office.

In February 1938 Hitler invited the Austrian chancellor, Kurt von Schuschnigg, to Berchtesgaden and forced him to sign an agreement giving the Austrian Nazis virtually a free hand. When Schuschnigg attempted to repudiate the agreement and announced a plebiscite on the question of an Anschluss with Germany, Hitler immediately ordered the occupation of Austria by German troops. The enthusiastic reception that Hitler himself received decided him to settle the future of Austria by outright annexation. He returned in triumph to Vienna, the scene of his youthful humiliations and hardships. No resistance was encountered from Britain and France. Hitler had taken special care to secure the support of Italy, and when this was forthcoming proclaimed his undying gratitude to Mussolini.

Having given assurances that the Anschluss would not affect Germany's relations with Czechoslovakia, Hitler proceeded at once with his plans against that country. Konrad Henlein, leader of the German minority in Czechoslovakia, was instructed to agitate for impossible demands on the part of

the Sudetenland Germans, thereby enabling Hitler to justify the annexation of Czechoslovakia. But the willingness of Britain and France to compel the Czech government to cede the Sudetenland areas to Germany presented Hitler with the choice between substantial gains by peaceful agreement and even greater acquisitions by a spectacular war against Czechoslovakia. Mussolini's intervention appears to have decided him, and he accepted the Munich Agreement on September 30--only to feel resentment immediately afterward at being cheated out of an impressive military conquest.

It was to be expected, therefore, that Hitler would waste no time in provoking an occasion for occupying the whole of Czechoslovakia. This he did by fostering Slovak discontent. On March 16, 1939, from the Hradcany Castle in Prague, he proclaimed the dissolution of the state whose existence he, as an Austrian, had always regarded as unnatural. Immediately afterward the Lithuanian government was forced to cede Memel (Klaipėda), on the northern frontier of East Prussia, to Germany.

Hitler was now ready to advance toward the ultimate objective of Lebensraum in the East. Confronted by an uncompromising Poland, guaranteed by Britain and France, he strengthened the alliance with Italy (the "Pact of Steel," May 1939) and negotiated a nonaggression pact with the Soviet Union, signed on August 24--just within the deadline set for an attack on Poland before the winter. He still disclaimed any quarrel with Britain, but to no avail, and the invasion of Poland (September 1) was followed two days later by a British and French declaration of war.

In his foreign policy Hitler combined complete opportunism in means and timing with unwavering pursuit of the objectives laid down in Mein Kampf. He showed astonishing skill in judging the mood of the democracies and exploiting their weaknesses--in spite of the fact that he had scarcely set foot outside Austria and Germany and spoke no foreign language. Up to this point every move had been successful--even his anxiety over British and French entry into the war was dispelled by the rapid success of the war in Poland. The result was to convince him more and more of his own infallibility and to induce him to push ahead still faster with his plans for conquest.

World War II.

Hitler from the first had assumed direction of the major strategy of the war. When the success of the campaign in Poland failed to lead to the peace negotiations with Britain for which he had hoped, he ordered the army to prepare for an immediate offensive in the west. Bad weather, however, provided the reluctant generals with the opportunity to postpone the western offensive, and this in turn led to two major changes in planning. The first, on the suggestion of Adm. Erich Raeder, commander in chief of the navy, was Hitler's order to occupy Denmark and Norway in April 1940. Hitler took a close personal interest in the operation, and from this time his intervention in the detail of military operations was to grow steadily greater.

The second was the adoption of Gen. Erich von Manstein's plan for an attack through the Ardennes (opened May 10) instead of through the Low Countries. Against his generals' advice, Hitler held back Gen. Heinz Guderian's tanks south of Dunkirk, thus enabling the British to organize the evacuation of their army. But the campaign as a whole was a brilliant success, and Hitler could claim the major credit for its overall planning. On June 10 Mussolini entered the war on the side of Germany, and at the end of June Hitler avenged the Treaty of Versailles by signing an armistice with France on the site of the Armistice of 1918.

The next step was the subjugation of Britain by aerial bombardment, followed by invasion. But, in the summer of 1940, long-term preparations were begun for the invasion of the Soviet Union, and, as the expected surrender of Britain still failed to materialize, the eastern campaign quickly came to dominate Hitler's conception of the grand strategy of the war to the exclusion of everything else. The Soviet Union had occupied eastern Poland and Bessarabia, and Hitler sought to counter any further moves by forcing the governments of Hungary and Romania to accept an agreement that he dictated and by urging the abandonment of Mussolini's plans for the invasion of Greece. Mussolini, however, piqued at being kept in ignorance of Hitler's intentions, invaded Greece; and the lack of success of the Italian armies made it necessary for German forces to come to their aid in the Balkans and North Africa. Hitler's plans were further disrupted by a coup d'état in Yugoslavia in

March 1941, overthrowing the government that had made an agreement with Germany. Regarding this as an insult to Germany and himself, Hitler immediately ordered his armies to subdue Yugoslavia. The campaigns in the Mediterranean theatre, although successful, remained subordinate to the eastern offensive, with which Hitler was so preoccupied that he lost the opportunism and flexibility that he had shown in political affairs. Even when Raeder and Erwin Rommel urged Hitler to destroy the whole British Middle East position by a final blow at Suez, he would spare no more forces from Operation "Barbarossa"--the planned invasion of the Soviet Union.

The attack against the U.S.S.R. was launched on June 22, 1941, with Hitler so confident of success that he refused to provide winter clothing and equipment for his troops. The German army advanced swiftly into the Soviet Union but failed to destroy its Russian opponent. Hitler became completely overbearing toward his generals. He disagreed with them about the object of the main attack, and he wasted time and strength by failing to concentrate on a single objective and by frequently reversing his own decisions. In December 1941 an unexpected Russian counterattack made it clear that Hitler's hopes of a single campaign would not be realized.

The next day came the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Hitler precipitately declared war on the United States--although the pact with Japan was purely defensive and he had not been informed of the Japanese intentions. Misled by an essentially central European view of world politics, he apparently took no account of the force that a mobilized United States could bring to bear in Europe.

Hitler's conduct throughout 1942 was marked by further errors of judgment--he paid insufficient attention to the Mediterranean and the Atlantic at a time when a relatively small additional effort in those theatres might have been decisive. In the Soviet Union his continued unreadiness to concentrate on a single objective probably forfeited the opportunity to capture Stalingrad while it was still lightly defended.

Meanwhile, he directed Himmler to prepare the ground for

the "new order" in Europe. The concentration camps were expanded, and there were added to them extermination camps such as Auschwitz and Mauthausen, as well as mobile extermination squads. The Jews of Germany, Poland, and the Soviet Union were most numerous among the victims; in German-occupied Europe between 5,000,000 and 6,000,000 had been killed by the end of the war as the only solution in Hitler's view of the Jewish "problem." The sufferings of other races were only less when measured in numbers killed. Such barbarism was indiscriminate, even where, as in the Ukraine, Hitler might have encouraged nationalist feelings to his own advantage. (see also Index: war crime)

At the end of 1942, defeat at el-Alamein and at Stalingrad brought the turning point in the war, and Hitler's character and way of life began to change. Theretofore, the success that he had imagined had been largely realized, but to preserve the world of fantasy from defeat and failure he isolated himself more and more from reality. Directing operations from his headquarters in the east, he refused to visit bombed cities or to read reports of setbacks; those close to him, especially Martin Bormann, his secretary, took care that only pleasing information reached him; and he became increasingly dependent on his physician, Theodor Morell, and the injections that he supplied. Even so, he had not yet lost the power to react vigorously in the face of misfortune. After the arrest of Mussolini in July 1943 and the Italian armistice, he not only directed the occupation of all important positions held by the Italian army but ordered the kidnapping of Mussolini, with the intention that he should head a new Fascist government. On the eastern front, however, the refusal to withdraw led only to greater losses without any possibility of holding up the Soviet advance. Inevitably, relations with his army commanders grew increasingly strained, the more so with the growing importance given to the SS divisions, directly responsible to Hitler. Meanwhile, the failure of the U-boat campaign and the bombing of Germany made more evident how reduced were the chances of victory.

All these factors made more desperate the few soldiers and civilians who were ready to remove Hitler and negotiate a peace. Several attempts were planned in 1943-44; the most nearly successful was made on July 20, 1944, when Col. Claus von Stauffenberg exploded a bomb at a conference at Hitler's headquarters in East Prussia. But Hitler escaped with superficial injuries, and, with few exceptions, those implicated in the plot were executed. The reduction of the army's independence was now made complete, with National Socialist political officers appointed to all military

headquarters. (see also Index: July Plot)

Thereafter, Hitler was increasingly ill and fatigued; but he did not relax or lose control over the Nazi Party or the army, and he continued to exercise an almost hypnotic power over his close subordinates, none of whom was able to wield any independent authority. In December 1944 he moved his headquarters to the west to direct an offensive in the Ardennes for which the last reserves of manpower were mobilized. When it failed, his hopes for victory became ever more visionary, based on the use of new weapons or on the breakup of the grand alliance, especially after the death of Roosevelt. Far from trying to save what could be rescued from defeat, he ordered mass material destruction and condemned his armies to death by refusing to allow them to surrender.

From January 1945 Hitler never left the chancellery in Berlin or its bunker, abandoning a plan to lead a final resistance in the south as the Soviet forces closed in on Berlin. In a state of extreme nervous exhaustion, prematurely senile if not insane, he at last accepted the inevitability of defeat and thereupon prepared to take his own life, leaving to its fate the country over which he had taken absolute command. Before this, two further acts remained. Around the midnight of April 28-29 he married Eva Braun. Immediately afterward he dictated his political testament, justifying his career and appointing Karl Dönitz as head of the state and Josef Goebbels as chancellor.

On April 30 he said farewell to Goebbels and the few others remaining, then retired to his suite and either shot or poisoned himself. His wife took poison. In accordance with his instructions, their bodies were burned.

Hitler's success must be attributed to the susceptibility of postwar Germany to his own unique talents as a political leader. His rise to power was not inevitable, and any change in a complex conjunction of circumstances might have relegated him to the obscurity and failure of his youth; yet there was no one who equalled his ability to exploit and shape events to his own ends. The power that he wielded was unprecedented, both in its scope and in the technical resources at its command; but he made no permanent

contribution, moral or material, to mankind. His originality and distinctiveness lay in his methods rather than in his ideas and purpose, which were shared in whole or in part by millions of people, in Germany and elsewhere. By the time he was defeated, he had broken down the whole structure of the world in which he lived and inaugurated a new era with even greater potentialities of power and destruction. (A.B./W.F.Kn.)