

The Inside Story of Hitler's Blood Purge

How He Consolidated His Power in Germany

(Continued from page one.)

tent and unrest had kept pace with the increasing economic difficulties and Germany's growing isolation. By the spring of 1934 the negative, indeterminate aspect of the Nazi dictatorship was all too apparent. Now criticism was open and unrestrained, coming chiefly from the conservative wing led by the economic reactionaries, and from the radical wing led by the Nazi activists—those so-called "national bolsheviks" who were weary of Hitler's middle course.

Hitler was following his characteristic policy of lurching along with a foot on each side. But it was obvious that if he did not soon crack down on the malcontents on both sides he would have to cope with either a second revolution or a reactionary putsch.

Hitler's eventual course was largely determined by the imminence of Hindenburg's death. The problem of succession was now acute. The man who wanted the presidency and the chancellorship knew that the *reaktion* had no intention of entrusting him with the supreme control of the reich, including the high command of the army. Once more a forgiving fate offered Hitler a chance to redeem himself, to attain his goal with the intellectual honesty of the strong. And again he preferred fraud—fraud which this time ended in murder. Deliberately he created a situation which enabled him to buy the highest executive power in the realm, but at the ghastly price of blood-letting.

The Fuehrer proceeded with his double game. In Ernst Roehm and Goebbels he had admirable instruments for goading the radicals on and for holding the masses in line; Goering's job was to manipulate the reactionaries in his rôle of their house servant. The *reaktion* was not a unit, comprising as it did numerous groups and subgroups, divided by political and economic interests, by personal ambitions and divergent viewpoints, in their attitude toward National Socialism. There were two main groups: the first, the Hindenburg faction, which included Papen, Baron von Neurath, and Blomberg and was based on the landed aristocracy and the Reichswehr, represented the political side of the *reaktion*; the second, the Goering-Thyssen-Schacht group, guarding the interests of heavy industry and the banks, with the police and the Stahlhelm as instruments of power, stood for the capitalistic side.

The Hitler faction in the reich embraced the middle classes, the farmers, and the non-Marxian workers. The party, the S. A., and the S. S. were its instruments of power and were in the main revolutionary in spirit. If Hitler should choose to down the *reaktion* by force he could count on Roehm, Goebbels, R. Walther Darré, Dr. William Frick, Rudolf Hess, Heinrich Himmler, Dr. Robert Ley, Alfred Rosenberg, and Baldur von Schirach, his most prominent men with direct political power.

If, on the other hand, the Fuehrer chose to buy off the *reaktion*, there was only one man he need fear—Roehm, his chief of staff. Now that Gregor Strasser had been eliminated, Roehm was the sole independent revolutionary activist with a definite aim and definite power.

Hitler apparently was preparing himself for either eventual. It is significant that at about this time he deprived Goering of his most powerful weapon—the secret police. On April 20 Himmler, the leader of the S. S., was made chief of the Gestapo. The man was Hitler's creature body and soul. Only 33 years old, he now possessed formidable power second only to Roehm's.

The Fuehrer continued his strategy of luring Roehm out on the end of a limb. On April 18, quite unnecessarily and of course to no avail, the chief of staff expounded the spirit of the S. A. and of the German revolution in a bombastic address before the wrong audience and at the

wrong place. He spoke before the diplomatic corps and the foreign press at the propaganda ministry, in Goebbels' presence and undoubtedly at the little devil's suggestion. In parading before the whole world the revolutionary significance of the S. A. poor Roehm, straightforward and unimaginative, was doing exactly what Hitler wanted—he was thrusting his head farther into the noose.

His master was now playing his unscrupulous game in masterly fashion; again his personal interests were at stake, and again he was without peer in political machination. Using Goebbels to frighten the *reaktion* with the threat of the "second revolution," he went on beguiling his old warrior Roehm to come out into the open. The revolutionary S. A., long the *bête noir* of the *reaktion*, would be splendid barter in exchange for the presidency and the army of the reich.

Let us remember the dates. Roehm made his speech on April 18. Himmler was appointed on April 20. In early May, Goebbels opened his dykes with a new flood of propaganda against "reactionaries and killjoys, alarmists and paltry critics." The little *agent provocateur* was succeeding both in scaring the *reaktion* and in throwing dust into Roehm's eyes. The S. A. chief's blindness to his danger can be explained only by the supposition that he must again have fallen under the spell of Hitler's "sincerity." Hitler definitely can exert fascination, and a man of Roehm's psychic weakness perhaps could not escape from his magnetic orbit.

Convinced of his leader's good faith, he apparently advised reconciliation with Gregor Strasser. Through Rudolf Hess, Hitler opened secret negotiations with Gregor the apostate looking to his reentry into the cabinet as minister of economics.

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It is unlikely that Hitler thought seriously for a single moment of taking Strasser back. He was negotiating with him for three reasons: to dupe Roehm, to make the *reaktion* more tractable when he let it be known that something was afoot between him and Strasser, and to keep him as an *ultima ratio* (last agreement). Obviously a potential Roehm-Strasser front with Hitler's blessing was a nightmare to the *reaktion*.

Gen. Kurt von Schleicher's re-appearance on the scene at this time did not simplify matters. His reconciliation with the Hindenburg circle suggested an opposing potential combination, for the general was ambitious and may have been seeking revenge. He was invited to a meeting in Bad Nauheim on May 16 at which the commanding generals of the Reichswehr discussed the problem that would be created by Hindenburg's death. Apparently even then the generals were agreed with Blomberg on Hitler, who reputedly had already made his pact with the Reichswehr minister on board the battleship Deutschland after maneuvers on April 11, 1934.

It is alleged that on this occasion the generals also debated the plan of the Hindenburg circle for securing from the dying president a political testament which would name the ex-



(Acme photo.)
Chancellor Hitler greets President von Hindenburg in Berlin in March, 1934, on the occasion of a memorial to Germany's war dead.

Who They Are

- The S. A., or Sturm Abteilung, are the politico-military group known as the storm troops. By 1934 they were said to number two and a half million. The Black Reichswehr originally was banded together to increase the military strength of Germany above the 100,000 set by the Versailles treaty. It was out of the Black Reichswehr that the S. A. grew.
- The S. S., or Schutz Staffel, are the bodyguard group organized by Hitler, commonly called the black bodyguard. This is a small group as compared with the storm troops.
- Stahlhelm (Steel Helmets)—An organization of German World war veterans. It helped put Hitler in power, but was dissolved by the Nazis late in 1935 for being too conservative.
- Reichswehr—The term applied to the German army of 100,000 men as permitted under the Versailles treaty.
- The Gestapo is the German secret police.

crown prince as his successor; he was to be a regent, like Admiral Horthy in Hungary. The regent would be entrusted with the direct command of the Reichswehr and would immediately proclaim a state of siege, which would automatically transfer the entire executive power from the Hitlerian civilian authorities to the reactionary military authorities. Though Hitler would remain as head of a new cabinet, government on the side by the party and by the S. A. would be abolished. Hitler could not have relished the plan.

The *reaktion* was now united, however, in working for the liquidation of the S. A., which they feared as the nucleus of a future "people's army." That danger had to be averted at all costs, for it would deprive them of their chief instrument of power, the Reichswehr.

Though Goering was not popular with the foreign office, which loathed his incursions into foreign fields; or with the Reichswehr, which wanted his air force incorporated into the Reichswehr ministry; nevertheless Hermann the bully was now inval-



Arrival of Hitler at his quarters in Nuremberg, Sept. 5, 1934, on the eve of the opening of a Nazi party convention in that city.

able to the *reaktion* because of his known hatred of both Strasser and Roehm. He had been Roehm's deadly enemy ever since the beer hall putsch in 1923, when Roehm had ascribed to Goering, then leader of the S. A., the main guilt for the catastrophe and had publicly branded him a coward who had fled.

While the front of the *reaktion*, with Papen, Neurath, Blomberg, Goering, Fritz Thyssen, and Dr. Hjalmar Schacht, fought the battle of its life with the front of the revolution headed by Roehm, with Gregor Strasser now looming in the background, Hitler made irreconcilable promises to both sides, still standing between them, ready to strike with Himmler and the S. S., but letting things drift.

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Roehm was engaged in a duel with Franz Seldte to bring about the liquidation of the Stahlhelm, the private army of the *reaktion*. At first Hitler sided with his chief of staff, but withheld his approval when Roehm ordered its dissolution. The dispute ended in a compromise, with the Stahlhelm becoming an S. A. reserve. Though Roehm seemed to have won the advantage, it was a Pyrrhic victory, for it had brought him into direct conflict with the Reichswehr, which was now convinced that his real ambition was to get command of the army.

Roehm's next step in the face of warning symptoms which should have put him on his guard is almost incomprehensible. If he had misgivings his Fuehrer probably was still able to dispel them; no doubt he appealed to Roehm's sense of duty; harping on the old theme of "higher interests," pointing to the impending death of the "Old Bull" (Hindenburg), which would settle everything. But now, for heaven's sake, let him keep quiet, for important decisions had to be made. There was the coming visit to Mussolini, and Schacht's efforts to obtain foreign loans.

At any rate, on June 8 the Voelkischer Beobachter printed an official report from Roehm's press bureau saying that the reichsminister and chief of staff was suffering from "a painful nervous disorder," and was taking a vacation of several weeks on the advice of his physicians; to forestall all misinterpreta-

tion, he declared that after his recovery he would continue to administer his office.

Evidently Roehm felt sure of his standing. Two days later the V. B. published his decree to the S. A. in preparation for its regular annual summer furlough, to begin July 1. Scoffing now at rumors of the impending dissolution or reduction of the S. A., he thus challenged his opponents: "... If the enemies of the S. A. hope that after its leave the S. A. will not be recalled, or will be recalled only in part, they may enjoy this brief hope. They will receive their answer at such time and in such form as appears necessary. The S. A. is and remains Germany's destiny."

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Two things, however, must have convinced Roehm that Hitler was planning to betray him. The first was Blomberg's leading article on the front page of the V. B. on June 28: the Reichswehr minister declared that the army's rôle in the third reich

the consent of Hitler and the Reichswehr.

Whatever he may have thought, he must have known then that Hitler had outwitted him, "the soldier who knew no compromise." But he could scarcely have had an inkling of the end Hitler had in store for him when in one of his last statements Roehm said, "The storm troops are ready to die for the ideal of the swastika."

At any rate a notice went out summoning all the S. A. leaders throughout the reich to appear in Wiessee—Roehm's retreat—on June 30 for a conference.

Events moved swiftly toward the ignoble last act of the drama. On June 28 Hitler flew with Goering to Essen to attend the wedding of Staatsrat Terboven. Goering returned to Berlin on the 29th, and Goebbels joined the Fuehrer, who had embarked on a round of visits to labor camps in the Rhineland "in order not to warn the traitors, so that the plan to carry out a thorough purge could be laid down in all details." This the

analogous measures in Berlin and Prussia in the action of purging."

Which is tantamount to saying that when Hitler was assured that all preparations had been made to nip in the bud a nonexistent attack on the régime he gave his accomplice Goering the cue to begin the massacre in Berlin; he would attend to the bloody work in Munich himself.

Hitler's apologia also declared that he had decided "to go personally to a prearranged meeting of S. A. leaders in Wiessee," an admission that Roehm's last act—if Roehm's it was—had not been secret and therefore not conspiratorial. Hitler as supreme leader of the S. A. had the right to preside at any S. A. meeting, anywhere and at any time. Dr. Otto Strasser reports that he personally saw a telegram which the adjutant of a murdered S. A. gruppenfuehrer showed him. It ran: "All obergruppen and gruppenfuehrer are ordered to appear in the staff quarters of the chief of staff in Wiessee at 10 a. m. on June 30. Adolf Hitler."

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Reaching Munich at 4 in the morning of June 30, Hitler was informed that the S. A. leaders residing there had already been either killed or arrested. He then set out for Wiessee, heavily guarded by S. S. men riding in armored cars before and behind his cavalcade. With him were Dr. Goebbels, Major Buch, Wilhelm Brueckner—Roehm's former friend and confidant, now Hitler's adjutant—Julius Schaub, Sepp Dietrich, Christian Weber, and Emil Maurice. They arrived at the Gasthaus Heinzlbauer about 6 o'clock.

While his companions "stormed" the rooms of Edmund Heines and other S. A. leaders, Hitler pounded with the handle of his dog whip on the door of Roehm's room. "Open the door!" he yelled.

Roehm's sleepy voice answered, "Yes, but who is it?"

"It's I—Hitler! Let me in!"

"What! You already? I thought you weren't coming before noon," and Roehm opened the door. Hitler met him with a flood of abuse, and Roehm, coming to himself in anger, began to roar back at him. He was being handcuffed when the innkeeper, awakened by the up-

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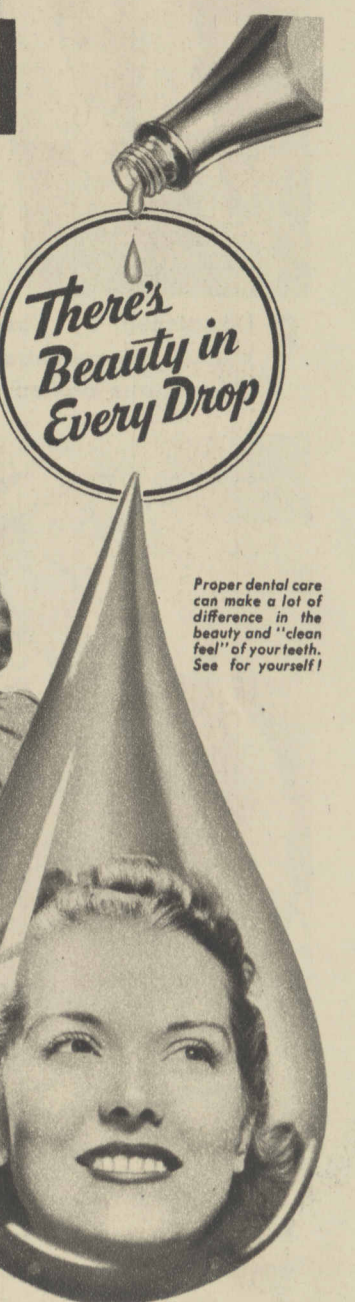
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(Associated Press photo.)
Capt. Ernst Roehm, victim of Hitler's blood purge, between Hermann Goering (left) and Hitler.

"Hitler's newspaper."