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CONTENTS

A CONCISE BIOGRAPHY OF ADOLF HITLER

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PRINTING HISTORY

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PREFACE

How to Use This Book, and Why

Was Hitler really a vegetarian? Is it true he helped design the Volkswagen? Was he homosexual? Did he consult with astrologers before making decisions?

For the foreseeable future, for better or worse, stories will be told about Hitler, assertions made. He and his hideous career are regularly invoked on subjects ranging from health food to mass murder. A book like this one may therefore serve as a useful reference, providing quick access to reliable information.

But the book has a larger purpose—to make Hitler real. To some degree he has already become a legendary creature, rather like Dracula or Frankenstein's Monster, the stuff of horror movies and comedies. Although we might prefer a Hitler cast out from the human race, it would be foolishness of the most dangerous kind to remove him from the flow of history and ignore the potential for evil that exists in all populations and institutions.

Popular interest in Hitler never flags, and since this book first appeared in 1990, the stream of books and

articles about him and Nazi Germany has only grown. There have been no great discoveries, no new facts that might alter the story but particular authors continue to bring their particular sensibilities to bear on different aspects of Hitler's life.

In 1997, the distinguished historian John Lukacs published *The Hitler of History*, a book which, in large part, is actually about books on Hitler. Lukacs demonstrates that there can be no single, objective account of the man and the monstrous history he made. The subject is too complex and all who write about Hitler either begin with or develop a point of view, which shapes their account; for example, was Hitler a natural consequence of the German history preceding him or an aberration?

Some of Hitler's biographers have argued that Hitler was little more than a power-hungry opportunist; others, that he was driven by psychosexual obsessions; still others, that he was a man of ideas genuinely bent on transforming Europe and the world. Lukacs himself has an argument to make. Although Hitler is often portrayed as a reactionary determined to return the world to some vaguely defined pre-modern condition, Lukacs believes he was actually a revolutionary, inspired and abetted by social, political and intellectual changes unleashed in the modern world. Perhaps most importantly, Lukacs refutes those historians who, in their portrayal of Hitler and his historical context, have sought to exonerate him or minimize his personal responsibility. The fact that circumstances favored his rise does not absolve Hitler of his enormous guilt.

In 1998, the essayist and novelist Ron Rosenbaum published *Explaining Hitler*, an account of his own at-

tempt to understand Hitler's character—how it formed; indeed, what was its real nature? For example, did Hitler kill only because he believed murder was necessary to accomplish his ends, or did he revel in it, finding exultation in destruction and death?

The dust jacket of Rosenbaum's book features Hitler's baby picture, an image that signifies the mystery that so intrigues Rosenbaum. How could someone born of flesh and blood do what Hitler did? After reading numerous books, Rosenbaum visited with scholars who have spent their lives studying and writing about Hitler. The result is a series of fascinating interviews. Inevitably the question of evil arises: Does evil exist apart from evil acts? Is it only an adjective or does it name something—perhaps an inchoate, incomplete form of human nature?

A Concise Biography of Adolf Hitler does not venture into speculation or abstraction. I believe it continues to be of value because it serves a simpler function, providing concrete details and anecdotes in an easily accessible format. Readers can peruse it straight through or, guided by the contents and index, go directly to areas and items of immediate interest. No matter what the approach, the reader will soon confront the malevolent storm of Hitler's soul—his hatred of Jews, his warmongering, the unrelenting drive to dominate the world and everyone in it.

A reader who finds a particular item literally incredible or wishes to pursue it more thoroughly can check the notes and sources section beginning on page 197. This is keyed to the bibliography, which follows it.

Because the book is organized by subject areas rather than dates, readers interested in the sequence of events

might wish to refer to the chronology, which starts on page 245.

There is no surer way to pull the cloak of mystery from a man than to provide a physical description of him, in this case beginning with that feature which is so emblematic of him—his mustache.

ONE

Hitler's Mustache

... the ridiculous little smudge which made him look as if he had not cleaned his nose.

—E. HANFSTAENGL

Hitler's mustache was a traditional type, but even among his supporters it was thought to look absurd and ugly on him. In 1923, Ernst Hanfstaengl, a close associate, suggested he let it grow out to the ends of his lips. Trying to be tactful, he told Hitler—leader of a Nazi Party that was still obscure and weak—that the short brush style was unfashionable.

Hitler's response was characteristic. "If it is not the fashion now, it will be later," he said, "because I wear it."

Anecdotes like this may help make Hitler accessible—if not fully understandable—and this is necessary because the very enormity of his crimes leads to his often being represented as either sub-human or as a supernatural figure, a demon. Both misconceptions are dangerous. They make him unreal, with the possible consequence of our forgetting that what he did can be done again.

It is for the sake of seeing Hitler just as he was that this collection of anecdotes and facts has been assembled.

The source material is abundant, enormous. Probably no one in history has been more closely observed and reported on. There is even an account of how he cultivated the famous forelock which, like his mustache, was an essential identifying element of his appearance. After the war, one of his secretaries described the procedure to an Allied interrogator:

He would bend over forward and comb his hair down before his eyes just like a woman does, then he would make the part and just loosely comb back the left portion so that with a jerk of the head the left forward lock would drop over his forehead—and this happened all the time during his speech making.

Hitler's hair was dark brown, almost black. His collar and shoulders were often flecked with dandruff.

The Hypnotic Stare

Hitler's eyes were blue, or blue-gray. An officer who worked at Headquarters during the war made the remarkable observation that Hitler sometimes crossed them, "in jest."

By the time Hitler was in his late forties, he had become farsighted. Reports sent to him had to be typed out on a "Fuehrer typewriter," the letters of which were about twice normal size, (almost half an inch high).

He regularly used eyeglasses and although he was photographed wearing them, publication of these photographs was forbidden. Some have survived, however, including one with an X through it, made on the proof sheet by Hitler himself.

Hitler's eyes are important historically because of the mystical qualities sometimes attributed to them; followers frequently describe them as blazing, hypnotic, dominating. In objective fact, they were physically prominent—large and slightly bulging—and Hitler made a point of using them for dramatic effect.

It was his practice, when meeting someone for the first time, to stare with what he imagined to be a penetrating gaze. Not surprisingly, this made a profound impression on many visitors, especially those who had come to the interview wanting this to be their unforgettable meeting with the self-described "greatest German of all time."

Others found the famous stare "opaque, dull."

Hitler's Head

Hitler's head was not remarkable, although he thought it was. In February 1937 he summoned a distinguished surgeon, Professor Ferdinand Sauerbruck, and a team of phrenologists to take measurements of his skull. These experts concluded that the various dimensions of Hitler's head (*e.g.* the distance from chin to forehead, from eye socket to eye socket, and so on) were: "Just like Napoleon's" and "Nothing like it since Frederick the Great!"

Hitler was delighted and had their findings written up

in a 130 page manuscript which was carefully stored in his private library.

Phrenology—the attempt to correlate skull measurements with intelligence and character—fitted in well with Nazi ideas about racial superiority, but of course this “science” is no science at all. The conclusions of any particular investigation seemed to depend almost entirely on the investigator’s preconceived ideas. In 1924, when Hitler was on trial for his failed early attempt to seize the government, the prosecution produced Max von Gruber, Professor of something called “racial hygiene,” who testified that Hitler’s features demonstrated, “bad race, mongrel. Low receding forehead, ugly nose, broad cheekbones, small eyes, dark hair . . .”

Height and Weight

For some reason, a common myth circulates to the effect that Hitler was abnormally short. In fact, he was just under five feet, ten inches.

He weighed about 155 pounds, but this is necessarily only an estimate. Hitler could not be weighed as an ordinary patient would because his personal peculiarities included a refusal to undress for medical examinations. According to one of his doctors, “Hitler had an extreme disinclination to let people see his body. Even I never saw him completely unclothed, let alone checked him over in that state.”

A wartime Allied song began, “Hitler, he only has one ball . . .” Since then, perhaps hundreds of pages have been written in serious debate as to whether or not there was anything unusual about Hitler’s genitals, often fo-

cusing on the possibility that he may indeed have had only one testicle. The debate has not been conclusive.

General Constitution

Although inclined to hypochondria, Hitler in middle age was a vigorous man with ruddy cheeks and excellent endurance.

There was an ominous significance to his good health, particularly because it was linked to his fear of physical decline. Despite repeated public assurances that he desired peace, he said something else to his Generals on April 20, 1939, the day he turned fifty. He told them he wanted to fight a war soon, while he was still strong. As the years passed, he explained, he would lose the stamina war required.

Less than five months later, on September 1, he invaded Poland and began World War II. (Franklin Roosevelt was fifty-seven; Winston Churchill, sixty-five.)

TWO

Hitler's Dog

I love animals, and especially dogs.

—HITLER

The man who murdered millions sometimes seemed capable of normal affection, but in everything he did, Hitler ultimately revealed an utter indifference to any life but his own. The sad story of his dog Blondi illustrates the point.

Hitler was fond of dogs and was rarely without one. In 1941, Martin Bormann, a top aide, sought to ingratiate himself by giving his Fuehrer a magnificent German shepherd bitch named Blondi.

The gift was a great success. Hitler enthusiastically began teaching Blondi tricks. Soon she could fetch, jump through hoops, clear a six-foot fence, even climb a step-ladder and beg. On special occasions, Hitler would have her "sing" for guests.

Hitler became devoted to Blondi. Delighted when he thought she was pregnant, he was deeply disappointed when he realized she was merely overweight.

Blondi always slept in Hitler's bedroom, in her special

wooden box. An Army sergeant named Tornow was detailed to attend to her full-time.

Whenever Hitler traveled, Blondi went with him, to his mountain villa, to the government Chancellery in Berlin, to his various military headquarters. And when the tide of war finally turned against the Nazis, Blondi—in a twist possible only in the kind of state Hitler had created—began to assume enormous importance.

With the German front in Russia in danger of complete collapse, Hitler's Generals wanted desperately to withdraw and consolidate their forces, but Hitler would have none of this. He was rigid in his strategy—no retreat, ever. The Generals were frantic, and then they realized Blondi offered an opportunity.

During even the most pressing military crises, Hitler took breaks between conferences, to walk Blondi and put her through her tricks. The Generals, who often went along, discovered that when Blondi performed well, Hitler mellowed, and in these brief periods of good humor would sometimes take their advice. Of course, if Blondi didn't do well, Hitler remained intractable. One of the officers later recalled, "I sometimes had the impression that the outcome of the Russian campaign depended more upon Blondi than the German general staff."

Despite Blondi (or perhaps she really wasn't very capable), the German armies were steadily torn to pieces. In time, as the Russians closed in on Berlin, Hitler moved into his bomb-proof bunker beneath the Chancellery garden, from which he continued to issue orders and battle plans, concocting elaborate but completely

groundless schemes for turning the cataclysmic defeat into victory.

Blondi, meanwhile, had managed to give birth to five pups, specially accommodated in a kennel built for them in the bunker. Of the litter, Hitler was particularly taken by one he dubbed Wolf, a favorite nickname. No one but Hitler was allowed to touch Wolf. He would stroke the pup with great tenderness, murmuring its name over and over.

Finally, even Hitler had to admit the war was lost. There was only one defeat left, and this he was determined to avoid. He had a morbid fear of being captured alive by the Russians, imagining among other things that they might put him on exhibit in a cage in Moscow. His recourse was suicide.

He intended to use cyanide, supplied in small glass ampules by the S.S. But then the unthinkable happened. The S.S. was headed by Heinrich Himmler ("the faithful Heinrich," Hitler called him), and Hitler learned that Himmler, operating out of reach in the north, was trying to open independent peace negotiations with the Allies. That made him a traitor.

Hitler quickly came to the conclusion that the cyanide supplied by Himmler's S.S. might not be cyanide at all. Perhaps it was only a knockout drug. Perhaps Himmler was planning to deliver him unconscious but alive to the Russians, for cash or favor. The cyanide had to be tested.

Hitler chose Blondi for the test.

Sergeant Tornow, Blondi's keeper, and a doctor named Haase took the dog into the bathroom. There, Tornow held her jaws open while Haase used a pair of pliers to push the ampule to the back of her mouth. Then

he squeezed, breaking the capsule and releasing the cyanide.

After it was over, the ever suspicious Hitler came into the bathroom to make sure Blondi was dead. He said nothing and his face displayed no emotion. Then he returned to his study, to continue planning his suicide.

Soon after, for some reason which is not recorded, Sergeant Tornow shot the pups.

THREE

Mein Kampf, Hitler's Book

Hitler's first battle was with the German language, and this fight, at least, he has not won.

—DOROTHY THOMPSON, 1939

To learn about a man's mind, it is usually instructive to study what he has written—but Hitler wrote a book so long and incoherent few people have been able to read it. Nevertheless, it made him a millionaire.

The book is *Mein Kampf*, and much of it was written in jail.

In 1924, Hitler was serving a sentence in Landsberg Fortress for his attempt to overthrow the government in the so-called Beer Hall Putsch. This violent, blatantly illegal episode had resulted in the deaths of sixteen Nazis and three policemen, but key members of the government secretly sympathized with Hitler's aims and he was treated well at Landsberg. Many jail personnel regularly greeted him with "Heil Hitler!"; admirers sent so many gifts his suite of rooms began to look like a cross between a delicatessen and a flower shop.

Hitler was not alone in his confinement. Other top Nazis rounded up after the failed overthrow were also

given rooms there. Although imprisoned, life was not unpleasant except for one problem—Hitler's endless harangues. Hour after hour, he talked on and on about his ideas, his plans, his destiny, himself. Then one of the prisoners had an ingenious idea. He urged Hitler not to waste these precious words. Instead of merely speaking them, why not save them for posterity by writing them down? Why not write a book?

Hitler promptly borrowed a Remington typewriter from the prison warden and set to work, dictating to his chauffeur, Emil Maurice, who typed. (Maurice was soon replaced by Rudolf Hess.) Hitler later said he was spurred on by the heavy clacking of the Remington's keys. And by the music. A gramophone played intoxicating, heroic Wagner records over and over as Hitler paced and ranted.

By the time of his early release "for good behavior" at the end of 1924, the book was well under way. Although it was eventually published as *Mein Kampf* (which means "My Struggle"), this was not Hitler's original title. Until he was dissuaded by his publisher, he had planned to call his book: *Four and a Half Years of Struggle Against Lies, Stupidity and Cowardice*.

Mein Kampf is a vicious book—chaotic and vile, like the mind of its author. In it, Hitler expounds the idea that the German people are a superior race who ought to rule the world; he calls for a war to defeat France and her allies and for German colonization of much of Russia.

Jews are depicted as engaged in a systematic attempt to corrupt and wreck all that is civilized and decent. Among Jewish tactics, we are told, is the raping of

German women in order to poison good German blood.

Hitler got much of his anti-Semitic ideas—including the grotesque sexuality—from tracts he had read in his youth. Similarly, the section of *Mein Kampf* devoted to the uses of propaganda was largely lifted from other sources (see chapter 17, "Hitler's Bookshelf").

p. 31

The autobiography in *Mein Kampf* is largely untrue.

Hitler's book was not a big seller at first but after he became Chancellor in 1933 it became required reading—or at least a required ornament—in almost every German home and office, as well as a *de rigueur* graduation present. Ultimately, a law was passed requiring every municipality in the land to buy and give a copy to each new married couple.

Hitler received an author's royalty, and *Mein Kampf* soon made him a multimillionaire. The process was hastened somewhat when he ordered the publisher (a Nazi firm) to raise his royalty from the customary ten percent of the cover price to fifteen.

Although tens of millions of copies of *Mein Kampf* were sold, its style was so convoluted and repetitious even dedicated Nazis couldn't get through it. One of them, Otto Strasser, picked out a few short passages and quoted them in a speech he gave at a Party rally in 1927. The Fuehrer's words were applauded vigorously. Later, at a dinner *not* attended by Hitler, some of Strasser's colleagues asked if he had actually read *Mein Kampf*. When he admitted he had not, everyone else at the table confessed the same shortcoming. More diners were expected, so those already present made a secret agreement. As each new diner arrived—and all were veteran, top-ranking Nazis—he would be asked if he had read

the great work. The first who claimed he had managed the task would be stuck with the dinner check for all. One of the men on whom this trap was sprung was Hermann Goering, the fat future Air Force chief and second in command to Hitler. He responded to the question by laughing out loud. Even Joseph Goebbels, future head of Propaganda for the Third Reich, admitted (with some show of guilt) that he had been unable to get through Hitler's book. At the evening's end, reports Strasser, each diner had to pay his own check. None of them had actually read *Mein Kampf*.

Of course, none of the Nazis really needed to. They all knew who Hitler was and what he stood for. It is commonly asserted, however, that had the leaders of other countries read Hitler's book, they might have stopped him before he plunged the world into war.

There was, understandably, little interest in *Mein Kampf* outside of Germany until Hitler came to power in 1933. But then, Hitler attempted to disguise the full extent of his ambitions by allowing only abridged editions to be published abroad. Much was omitted, including his plans to destroy the world's democracies. Most of the anti-Jewish diatribes were left in, Hitler apparently believing these would not have an adverse effect on general world opinion.

At least one world leader was not misled by the abridged edition. The copy which belonged to Franklin Roosevelt is preserved in the library of his Hyde Park home. On its flyleaf, President Roosevelt wrote this:

The White House—1933—This translation is so expurgated as to give a wholly false view of what

Hitler is and says—the German original would make a different story.

The British were equally well informed. Their Embassy in Berlin supplied them with detailed descriptions of the full-length version. These and other digests were circulated throughout the government by the Foreign Office and studied carefully.

Mein Kampf was not ignored. The problem seems to have been that few people could bring themselves to believe Hitler would really attempt what he threatened. He was, after all, a politician and politicians must anchor themselves in reality or disappear. Only a savage lunatic would actually try to conquer the world.

In 1939, British and American publishers issued complete translations of *Mein Kampf* without Hitler's approval. All profits were donated to charity. The Book of the Month Club offered it as a main selection, but had to downgrade it to "alternate" because of lack of subscriber interest. A number of short pamphlets and digests highlighting *Mein Kampf*'s true nature did achieve sales in the hundreds of thousands, including one prepared by Alan Cranston, who later became the senior Senator from California. (The American publishers of *Mein Kampf* sued Cranston's publishers over copyright infringement. This became the basis for an enduring popular legend that Cranston was sued by Hitler.)

Hitler made any number of predictions in *Mein Kampf*. Some were wildly wrong; for example, he did say that ultimately Japan and the United States would go to war but he also asserted that Britain would be Japan's principal ally in this struggle.

Sometimes he was right, and ignored his own warning at immense cost. He said Germany must never ally herself with the Soviet Union for that would inevitably unleash a war that would result in "the end of Germany."

More than a decade later, in August, 1939, he concluded an alliance with the Soviet Union that allowed Germany to seize half of Poland (and the Soviets to take the other half). And that, of course, triggered the Second World War.

FOUR

Hitler's Names and Titles

... Schicklgruber seemed to him so uncouth, so boorish, apart from being so clumsy and impractical.

—AUGUST KUBIZEK, BOYHOOD
FRIEND OF HITLER

Because Hitler's career depended to such a great degree on the image he projected, an awkward name would have been a severe handicap. Even the most obedient and adoring of Nazis might have had difficulty saluting his Fuehrer with a crisp "Heil Schicklgruber!"

Journalists in Austria, in the years when Hitler was still only threatening to annex that country, were the first to claim Hitler's real name was Schicklgruber. They meant to mock him, and to suggest he was illegitimate. In fact, Hitler was born Hitler, but the truth about Schicklgruber is significant.

Schicklgruber was his grandmother's name, and she was unmarried when her son Alois was born; thus, Hitler's father was named Alois Schicklgruber. It was not until he was thirty-nine years old that he appeared at the local church and asked that his name be changed in the

birth register. He claimed that his father was one Johann Georg Hiedler.

Despite the fact that Hiedler had been dead for twenty years, Alois's claim was accepted and Schicklgruber became Hiedler—which can be spelled several ways, including the form Alois chose and Adolf made notorious.

Alois's motive for the name change is obscure; evidence suggests a maneuver to obtain a legacy.

Because the identity of Alois's father—Hitler's grandfather—cannot be established, many myths have flourished, including the one which asserts that Hitler was part Jewish. There is no evidence to substantiate this, and much to discredit it.

The significant point is simple. Hitler did not know who his grandfather was and yet (or perhaps because of this uncertainty, according to historians who have investigated his psychology), a crackpot theory about genetic purity became the basis of Nazi philosophy. After Hitler came to power, a citizen who wished to prove he was "uncontaminated" by non-German (most particularly, Jewish) blood, had to be able to trace his lineage at least through his grandparents, and this Hitler himself could not do.

Adolf

Hitler liked to point out that his first name was a contraction of two old German words, "Altha" and "Wolfa," which taken together mean Noble Wolf.

"Herr Wolf" was the name he chose when it was necessary for him to travel in secrecy in the early days of Nazi Party intriguing. When he telephoned Winnifred

Wagner, the great composer's daughter-in-law and an important early supporter, he identified himself with a coy "Conductor Wolf calling." Another doting dowager addressed him as "my little wolfie."

In later years, after he had pitched the world into war, he gave many of his field headquarters melodramatic wolf designations—Wolf's Glen, Wolf's Lair, Werewolf.

Finally, it is reliably reported that Hitler's self-identification with wolves went so far that in moments of distraction he would absentmindedly whistle a favorite tune, "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?"

Ade

In the early days, Hitler's associates often addressed him with nicknames such as "Ade," "Adi" and "Ahi." In conversation, many used the familiar second person pronoun, "du," rather than the more formal "sie."

Behind his back, some Nazis referred to him as "the Manitou." "Manitou" is an American Indian term for a kind of haunting spirit, often malevolent.

Fuehrer

"Fuehrer" means Leader. In July, 1921, Hitler quit the Nazi Party in a dispute over policy, saying he would return only if he were acknowledged as the Party's Leader without question. Since it was Hitler's single-minded energy and oratorical power which had earned the obscure Party any attention at all, the members

agreed to his demand and he was hailed as the Fuehrer.

People closely associated with him continued to use nicknames and address him familiarly. Throughout his career members of his entourage usually referred to him as "der Chef," (the Chief).

As his power grew, he sought ways to further glorify himself. Late in 1931, Party members were officially directed henceforth to address him always and as nothing less than, "mein Fuehrer."

On January 30, 1933, Hitler acquired a new and very significant title when President Hindenburg appointed him Chancellor of Germany. (The President was the Chief of State, while the Chancellor ran the government.) A year and a half later, when Hindenburg died (of natural causes), Hitler eliminated the title of President, assumed the powers of the office, and created a new government title—Fuehrer and Reich Chancellor. (Later, Hitler said, "Anyone at all can be made a president, but it's not possible to give the title of 'Fuehrer' to a nobody.")

At the end of June 1934, Hitler secured his power with a brief but thorough wave of murders known as the Blood Purge. Its victims included opponents outside the Party but it was principally directed against a Nazi faction making demands he found inconvenient. The most prominent member of this faction was Ernst Roehm, leader of the brown shirt Storm Troopers and formerly a close Hitler associate.

After these murders, no one used the familiar "du" in addressing Hitler.

Grofaz

In the wake of the conquest of France in June 1940, Hitler's sycophantic underlings competed in their gushing compliments. Foremost among these was his Chief of Staff, Field Marshal Keitel, who dubbed Hitler "Grosster Feldherr aller Zeiten" (Greatest Commander of All Time)—commonly contracted to "Grofaz." Thereafter, Hitler gurgled with pleasure when he was thus addressed or when the term was skillfully dropped within earshot.

In 1942, Hitler assumed one more title, "Oberster Gerichtsherr," which means Supreme Judge. His word was now quite literally the law. This of course only formalized a situation which had prevailed for years.

By 1943, it was becoming increasingly clear to everyone that the Nazi cause was doomed, or at least Hitler was. An English journalist noted that Propaganda Minister Goebbels wasn't using the word Fuehrer nearly as much as he once had in his articles and speeches. Instead, the term "Fuehrung" often appeared. "Fuehrung" means the Leadership, of which the Leader is only a part. Was Goebbels preparing the public for something? After the war, it was learned that when complaining to his inner circle about the course of the war, Goebbels often muttered, "If I were the Fuehrer . . ."

Fortunately for Goebbels, no one seems to have mentioned these mutterings to Hitler. As for the public use of Fuehrung, Hitler was getting to the point where he no longer wanted to take responsibility for what was happening. Routinely, he complained that his Generals were letting him down, not following his orders, betray-

ing him. Like the Nazis who would survive the war, he was already ducking the blame.

In the end, Goebbels apparently decided there was no Fuehrer, no Leader, but Adolf Hitler. Within hours after Hitler's suicide, Goebbels killed himself, as did his wife. Before this final act, which they regarded as proving their devotion to their Fuehrer, this monstrous couple poisoned their children.

FIVE

The Nazi Swastika

A new age of magic interpretation of the world is coming.

—HITLER

Hitler imagined himself a great originator, a genius, but when the Nazis were just getting started and needed their own slogans and symbols, he seemed incapable of actually creating anything. He was, however, good at borrowing and adapting. Some of his sources are surprising.

Sieg Heil!

... means "Hail Victory!" An essential element of the huge Nazi rallies was the repeated, coordinated shouting of phrases like "Sieg Heil" and "Heil Hitler." Hitler got the idea for this from an old American custom.

His friend Ernst Hanfstaengl, although German, had been sent by his parents to study at Harvard. He also happened to be a skilled amateur pianist, and Hitler frequently had him play the Wagner melodies he found relaxing and inspiring. One night, sometime in the early

1920s, Hanfstaengl departed from the usual repertoire with a sampling of music Hitler had never heard before—the marches used at halftime in American football games. Hanfstaengl described college cheerleading and "the deliberate whipping up of hysterical enthusiasm." He told Hitler about the thousands of spectators being led in roars of, "Harvard, Harvard, Harvard, rah, rah, rah!" and about "the hypnotic effect of this sort of thing."

Hitler was wildly enthusiastic. "That is it, Hanfstaengl, that is what we need for the movement, marvelous." And as he said this, Hitler "pranced up and down the room like a drum majorette."

Hanfstaengl concludes his account of this extraordinary episode by saying, "... 'Rah, rah, rah!' became 'Sieg Heil, Sieg Heil!'—that is the origin of it and I suppose I must take my share of the blame."

Heil Hitler

At one time, using "Heil" (Hail) as a greeting was completely free of sinister connotation. Merely an enthusiastic form of "Hello," it was a customary salutation in Austria and Bavarian Germany, where the Nazi Party got started.

In the Party's early days, Nazis commonly used the Heil greeting among themselves, as in "Heil Hanfstaengl" or "Heil Ludecke." In time, the phrase "Heil Hitler" became a kind of insider's password by which Nazis made themselves known to one another. Ultimately, as part of establishing an exalted status for Hitler, it was ruled improper for anyone but him to be addressed with "Heil."

After the Nazis came to power, "Heil Hitler" was designated the official "German greeting," to be used by all citizens in all communications, verbal and written. This directive was widely obeyed, usually with genuine enthusiasm.

Hitler Salute

The rigidly outstretched right arm salute was copied from the Italian Fascists of Benito Mussolini, who was firmly in power by the end of 1922, when Hitler still only dreamt of ruling Germany. Indeed, for years, Hitler was routinely identified in American and English newspapers as the German Mussolini.

Hitler bragged that he could hold the salute far longer than any of his subordinates and at ceremonies and reviews did exhibit a remarkable endurance. Contemporary legend ascribed this to a collapsible spring support under his jacket sleeve.

It is certain that it was highly dangerous for bystanders *not* to give the Nazi salute when Hitler's Storm Troopers paraded through a city's streets. The marchers would break ranks and attack any who thus failed to show their respect, often beating them senseless. This happened so commonly that American tourists were warned by the American Ambassador to either give the salute or get off the street when they saw a parade coming.

Nazi

Apocryphal tales surround the word, "Nazi"; the truth is simple and straightforward.

The group Hitler joined in late 1919 was called the German Workers' Party. Four months later, to show its affinity with other radical nationalist organizations, the group added a designation used by many of them—National Socialist. Thus, the still small organization acquired its long name—National Socialist German Workers' Party.

Hitler wanted to dump all this and use the simpler "Social Revolutionary Party" but he was not yet in control. By the time he was, he was stuck with the unwieldy name.

He and fellow members called themselves National Socialists; "Nazi" was a common and not inherently derogatory contraction of this.

However, American reporters broadcasting from Germany before the war were ordered to drop the term and to always employ "National Socialist" instead. The Germans had come to the conclusion that as a word, Nazi had "a bad sound" in America and that getting rid of it would improve their image.

Third Reich

Hitler's regime is often referred to as the Third Reich, a term vigorously promoted by Propaganda Minister Goebbels. "Reich" means "Empire." The first Reich was the Holy Roman Empire of the Middle Ages; the second, the one established by Bismarck and ended by Germany's defeat in 1918.

Hitler himself rarely referred to his rule as the Third Reich, and at the beginning of World War II actually outlawed its use. He spoke simply of the Reich, as though there had never been another.

Nazi propaganda also described the regime as the Thousand Year Reich. This term has a particularly lethal history. In June 1934, a year and a half after becoming Chancellor of Germany, Hitler ordered the wave of assassinations and executions called the Blood Purge, directed principally at rivals within the Party. He excused these murders by saying his rivals had been plotting revolution, and promised there would be no further upheavals in Germany for a thousand years. In fact, of course, his Reich lasted little more than twelve years.

The Swastika

A tremendous amount of nonsense has been written about the purported occult power of the emblem the Nazis adopted as their own—the swastika. This sort of thing pleased Hitler very much because he knew people were awed by mystery, and swayed by it.

In fact, the swastika is an ancient symbol, most probably meant to represent the sun wheeling across the sky. It first appeared in ancient India, is found in cultures throughout the world, and—until the Nazis got hold of it—was regarded for thousands of years as a symbol of good fortune. (In some mythologies, a swastika whose arms point to the left instead of the right signifies darkness and evil.)

Hitler may have first seen a swastika (arms pointing right) at the age of seven, while taking singing lessons

in a church in the town of Lambach. The bishop of Lambach's coat of arms included a swastika, and one was carved above the pulpit.

August Kubizek, his boyhood friend, reports that Hitler again encountered the ancient symbol while reading about Nordic gods and early German tribes and thought it important. "Adolf said at that time that the German people needed a symbol which would represent the basic concept of Germandom."

After the First World War, Hitler toyed briefly with the idea of writing a "monumental history" of mankind. He scribbled a brief outline for this and when he sketched the design for a cover, he included a swastika flag.

However, the swastika was not a great Hitler discovery. It had been used for years by many of the radical right-wing groups which flourished throughout Germany and Austria. The Nazis were among the last to pick it up but then Hitler did make every effort to employ it to maximum effect, lavishing his personal attention on designing the badges, flags, standards and armbands featuring it. He insisted it always be a black swastika set in a white circle and—most importantly—the background must always be red. That was the color that captured people's attention, he said, adding this was something he had learned from the Socialists.

In time, the swastika and Nazism were synonymous. On March 12, 1933, six weeks after he became Chancellor, Hitler announced that henceforth whenever the German flag was displayed, the swastika flag of the Nazi Party would fly alongside it.

Finally, at the annual Party Rally in Nuremberg in

September 1935, he decreed that the swastika alone would represent both the Party and the nation. The one-party state was firmly established. (At the same time, the notorious "Nuremberg Laws" were promulgated, forbidding marriage between Jews and non-Jews, and depriving all German Jews of citizenship.)

SIX

Henry Ford's Nazi Medal

Henry Ford—to Europeans, the incarnation of wealth in its alluring bulk.

—KURT LUDECKE, HITLER AIDE

In 1937, Hitler created a special new medal—the Cross of the German Eagle Order—for foreign friends of the Reich. The first American to whom it was awarded was Henry Ford.

Consisting of a Maltese cross bracketed with four eagles and four swastikas, it was clearly a Nazi medal and although its presentation to Ford was ostensibly only to honor him on his seventy-fifth birthday, it may have really been acknowledgment for past services rendered to the Nazi cause.

The connection between Hitler and Ford went back at least fifteen years. In 1922, a reporter visiting Nazi headquarters in Munich noted that a large portrait of Ford hung on the wall beside Hitler's desk.

Without question, Ford and Hitler had something in common, at least at that time. They both hated Jews. Ford had bought an American newspaper, the *Dearborn Independent*, and used it to publish a long series of ar-

ticles which claimed that for centuries Jews had been systematically conspiring to destroy Christian civilization. Their crimes, Ford insisted, included starting the First World War.

The Dearborn *Independent* was a small town paper when Ford bought it but achieved a nationwide circulation of nearly 750,000 a week, in large part because Ford dealerships throughout the country were required to sell it.

Eventually, the *Independent's* anti-Semitic articles were collected and published under the title, *The International Jew*. The German translation became a best-seller.

Hitler was enthusiastic about *The International Jew*, had copies prominently displayed at Nazi headquarters, and ultimately ordered it translated into a dozen other languages and distributed throughout the world.

There may have been an even more sinister connection between Ford and Hitler. Rumors circulated in the early 1920s that Ford was pouring money into the Nazi Party; the story was plausible enough for the senior American Vice Consul in Munich to visit Hitler in person and ask about it.

Hitler denied the rumor but his words suggested he was hopeful. He said, "Mr. Ford's organization has so far made no money contributions to our Party."

It was soon clear that had contributions been uncovered, the United States would have been involved in a serious international incident. About eight months after the Vice Consul's visit, Hitler attempted the violent overthrow of the government which became known as the "Beer Hall Putsch." If Ford had been financing Hit-

ler, he would have been financing revolution.

It must be said that despite renewed assertions in the wake of the uprising—and a U.S. Congressional investigation—no concrete evidence was ever found proving that Hitler had received money from Ford. In 1927, Ford professed a change of heart and disavowed his anti-Semitism.

However, eleven years later, in April 1938 and well into the rapid Nazi rearmament, when Hitler asked him to build a truck and automobile assembly plant in Berlin, Ford agreed. Construction was soon under way, and in July Ford was awarded his swastika-studded Cross of the German Eagle Order.

In October of that year, another famous American received the Cross—Charles Lindbergh. It wasn't anti-Semitism or industrial support that endeared Lindbergh to Hitler, but a convergence of views on American foreign policy and Nazism. Lindbergh said repeatedly and publicly that the United States ought to stay out of European affairs, by which he meant the United States ought not to oppose Hitler.

He said any such intervention would be doomed because Germany's air power made her unbeatable, and in any event he evidently didn't think Hitler was evil and dangerous because he argued that Nazism might well be superior to democracy as a form of government.

Hitler could not have invented a more perfect propagandist.

Undoubtedly, neither Ford nor Lindbergh knew what Hitler really thought of the medal he gave them, the Cross of the German Eagle Order. In a private conversation with his cronies, he made a remark that was an

extraordinary combination of nationalistic arrogance and penny-pinching. He said he had created the special medal so no purely German decoration would be defiled by being given to a foreigner. Also, "this new decoration will be a lot cheaper than the gold or silver cigarette cases which the Reich was formerly wont to present to foreigners."

In his heart, Hitler almost always had contempt for those who served him.

SEVEN

The Fuehrer's Volkswagen

The Volkswagen—and I think our war experiences justify us in saying so—is the car of the future.

—HITLER

A year after taking power, Hitler announced at the Berlin Auto Show of 1934 that he would do for Germany what Henry Ford had done for America—create a mass-produced car anyone could afford. The result was the Volkswagen beetle, the biggest selling car of all time.

Hitler had always been fascinated by automobiles, although he never learned to drive one. He used chauffeurs, claiming he dared not drive because of his political prominence. In the event of an accident, he said, the blame would inevitably fall on him. Perhaps this was his sole motive but it is quite likely that he refused to attempt driving for the same reason he rarely undertook anything new. Learning to drive would have meant a period of awkwardness and failure. Hitler believed a man who intended to rule the world should never be seen falling short in any respect. He must appear infallible, always and at everything.

Hitler's interest in cars was so great as to be one of the few things which could distract him from his political career. In the years when he was campaigning for power, he traveled incessantly throughout Germany, speaking at rallies and meetings; but sometimes, when he arrived in a town he had not been in before, he failed to show up for the scheduled appearance. The aides who went looking for him did not bother with bars or brothels. They knew they would find him browsing at the local automobile dealer's showroom.

At first he could afford only used cars but as his financing improved, Hitler moved up to new cars—always Mercedes, and always powerful. On one occasion, in Nuremberg, when he was bragging about his latest 200 h.p. acquisition, two colleagues challenged him, claiming that on ordinary roads, with curves and traffic, all that power would give him no advantage. Hitler took the dare and granted the two a fifteen-minute head start on the road back to Munich.

They raced off but soon realized Hitler was catching up, so when they got to the next town they turned off the road and hid behind a church. The trick worked. Hitler roared by and kept going. After he had cleared the town, the challengers got back on the road and, keeping out of sight, trailed him as he spent the rest of the day in a frustrated attempt to pass them. Later, in Munich, when they confessed what they had done, he stalked off in anger.

The Beetle Is Born

Although Volkswagens became so closely associated with him as to be popularly dubbed "Baby Hitlers" by

Germans, the idea of producing an automobile the average German could afford did not originate with Hitler. Ferdinand Porsche, famous for his high performance cars, had been developing a "people's car" (volkswagen) for some time when he was summoned for a meeting with the Fuehrer in May 1934.

Hitler looked over Porsche's designs and ordered changes, directing the car be air-cooled and that it be a four-seater so it could serve as a family car. It was at this meeting that he also gave the VW its characteristic shape, and one of its most famous nicknames. For the sake of streamlining, he said it "should look like a beetle."

Because almost everything Hitler did was destructive and repulsive, it may seem inconsistent that he was capable of suggesting anything useful. He may have just gotten lucky on this. During the war, he decided that naval designers erred when they put propellers at the rear of ships. The Navy at the time had its hands full with, among other things, the Battle of the Atlantic and trying to supply the North African campaign, but Hitler ordered resources be devoted to the building of a ship with its screws along the side.

The project was a flop. Indeed, Hitler's ideas about science and technology—and his insistence in exerting his will in these areas—proved to be a substantial handicap in the development of advanced weapons which might have changed the outcome of the war (see chapter 28, "Hitler's Atomic Bomb").

Although Hitler did have some good ideas about the Volkswagen, the official name he chose was not one of them. Porsche wanted "Volkswagen" but Hitler insisted

on "KdF-Wagen." KdF was a contraction of the German words meaning Strength Through Joy.

The Strength Through Joy program provided vacations, recreational facilities and other amenities that were supposed to make life beautiful for German workers and their families. The program achieved some popularity but many Germans referred to it by another phrase the initials of which are also KdF—*Kotz durchs Fenster*—which means Vomit Through the Window.

At some point, Hitler gave up and began using "Volkswagen" himself.

Handmade Models Only

The first, hand-built Volkswagens were shown in 1938, four years after Hitler announced the program, but they were not available to the public.

Asked when they would be, the German Press Attache in Washington joked that the VW ought to be called "Christ" because "everyone talks about Him without having seen Him."

To get the Volkswagen into mass production, the Nazis came up with a unique twist on time-payment. Instead of the customer making a down payment, getting the car, and then paying it off, Germans were expected to pay the full price in advance and thus underwrite the production. People who elected to do this were given a booklet into which they were to paste stamps they received in return for a weekly 5-mark payment. After four years and eleven months of this, they would have paid the full sales price of 990 marks (plus 200 marks for insurance), and the car would be theirs. A thousand

marks was roughly the equivalent of \$400.

Ultimately, more than three hundred thousand Germans subscribed for the new car. Some, no doubt, subscribed with optimism; others were only obeying the unwritten rules of life in a totalitarian state.

The total number of Volkswagen cars actually produced before the war barely exceeded two hundred, and these were given to top Nazi officials, including Hitler. His was kept at his mountain estate near Berchtesgaden because it was particularly well suited to the steep, narrow roads.

It was Hitler's habit each day to walk from the Berghof, his chalet, to a small tea house nearby. When it was time to return to the Berghof, he often called for his chauffeur and his Volkswagen. (It was grayish-blue in color, as were all the VWs.)

As Hitler pursued his bellicose foreign policy, the German public began to suspect the Volkswagen factory might not be making what the customers were paying for. A new joke circulated: a worker at the VW plant decided he would get a car for himself by sneaking out the parts and assembling them at home. Imagine his surprise, went the story, when he was done and found the finished product was not a family car, but a motorized gun carrier.

By the time the main Volkswagen plant at Wolfsburg was fully operational, there was no question of its producing cars for civilians. Instead, the plant began turning out the German equivalent of the Jeep, called the Kubelwagen ("Bucket Car"). Years after the war, this model became a great commercial success, marketed in the U.S. as "The Thing." During the war the factory also produced a

version of the Kubelwagen called the Schwimmwagen, for amphibious operations. It had a sealed, waterproof body and a retractable propeller (in the rear).

The factory also produced airplane parts and at one point was assembling sixty V-1 "buzz bombs" a day. The V-1, the first of Hitler's "Vengeance Weapons," was the pilotless robot jet used against London.

A series of Allied bombing raids succeeded in putting the VW factory almost completely out of operation by August 1944. It was only after the war that bomb disposal experts discovered how close one particular bomb had come to putting an end to the Volkswagen forever. It had scored a direct hit, falling right between the two great turbines which powered the factory. An explosion would have destroyed them and the Volkswagen car would probably have become one of the "might have beens" of history. But there was no explosion. The direct hit had been a dud.

By the summer of 1945, the plant was back in production, assembling a small number of Kubelwagens for the occupying British. At the very end of the year, the production of VW Beetles began. By March 1946, a thousand cars a month were coming off the assembly line.

The original three hundred thousand subscribers never got anything for their money, but by 1948, the VW was finally being offered through a regular dealership network.

By the time production of the basic model was discontinued in the middle of 1985, more than twenty million had been sold . . . none of them called KdF-Wagens, but all of them shaped like beetles.

EIGHT

Backstage Hitler

Agitation, moral indignation, sympathy, shock, sincerity, condolence, reverence—he had a posture for everything.

—ERNST VON WEISZACKER,
NAZI DIPLOMAT

Hitler wanted to be seen as impulsive, emotional, inspired. In fact, he was a cool manipulator who carefully planned for maximum effect. He even had himself photographed after buying new clothes so he could study his appearance from all angles. If the result was unsatisfactory, the new clothes were discarded.

When Hitler decided to change the style of his military hat, someone had an ingenious idea which spared him the modeling sessions. A wax sculpture of his head was made and sent to the hat factory, where the various styles were placed on it and photographed. But when the pictures were delivered to Hitler, he suspected a plot.

There was nothing wrong with the hats. It was the wax head; the mustache on it was too broad—rather like Stalin's, in fact—and Hitler suspected he was being insulted.