

Adolf Hitler Profile

Teacher Created Materials, Inc. World War II.

Adolf Hitler was a man of unharnessed hate and anger, who led Germany to unimagined heights of power and just as quickly to its most disastrous, devastating, and humiliating defeat. The hate and anger were Hitler's reactions to the humiliation heaped upon Germany by the Allies, who imposed a peace treaty on the Germans at the end of World War I that guaranteed another world war within a generation. Together with his Nazi Party, Hitler was determined to get revenge, and he led Germany down a path that ended with the Second World War and some of the most heinous crimes in history. Despite his diabolical plans, Hitler was, in many ways a genius. His organizational skills in creating the Nazi Party, in combination with his powerful oratory, were his genius, and it was thoroughly evil.

Adolf Hitler was born in Austria. His father was a middle-level government official, and his mother was a simple peasant housekeeper. His father was strict and overbearing, but the young Adolf had a deep love for his mother. He wanted to be an artist, and that is the career he vainly pursued in Vienna in the years prior to World War I. Hitler moved to Munich, a province of Bavaria, and when the war broke out he joined the German Army. He served with distinction and earned the Iron Cross for bravery, always looking back at his war years with pride.

The *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (National Socialist German Workers' Party, the NSDAP, or Nazi Party) was his creation. He was not a founding member of the small political party from which it developed, the *Deutsche Arbeiter Partei* (DAP), but upon being invited to join its ranks, Hitler moved rapidly to the position of leadership. Under his guidance, it became the National Socialist organization that would reflect his policies and define his program. In quick order, he became *Der Fuhrer* (The Leader), undisputed head of the NSDAP, putting together the program of the Nazi Party that remained unchanged to the very end. Had the world bothered to read *Mein Kampf*, written in 1924, it would have known that Adolf Hitler and his Nazi Party would be a disaster if they gained power. Hitler was recognized as the best speaker in the ranks of the party. He was an orator with the gift and talent to hold an audience spellbound and to rouse the rabble in the beer halls of Munich to a fever pitch of excitement and adulation. He won converts, and under his leadership the party soon had several thousand members. Hitler's party was like many others that sprouted up following the defeat of Germany in World War I and the establishment of the Weimar Republic. These parties were all nationalistic and anti-Semitic, with the avowed purpose of bringing down the Weimar Republic and tearing into shreds the hated Treaty of Versailles.

In the closing months of World War I when the military leaders knew the struggle was at an end and all was lost, the German government was urged to ask for an armistice and peace treaty based on Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points. Instead of the negotiated settlement, the Germans were presented with the Treaty of Versailles and told to sign or else the Allied armies would invade the Reich. For the German nation, this became the *Diktat*, a humiliating peace that blamed Germany for the war, that took away large areas of territory and severed millions of Germans from the Fatherland, and that burdened the people with reparations that would take generations to pay. When revolution erupted in the closing days of 1918, the Kaiser abdicated and went into exile. The Social Democrats, Germany's largest political party, established the Weimar Republic.

As German armies slowly returned to the Reich, a myth was entrenched in the imaginations of the populace that the German army had not been defeated on the field but had been stabbed in the back by the Social Democrats, the politicians who had betrayed the people, the "November Criminals" who had signed the Treaty of Versailles. These were recurring themes in Hitler's speeches as he asserted that Germany's soldiers had been "stabbed in the

back” by the politicians of the Weimar Republic, adding that Jews and Bolshevik ramblings were also to blame for the problems of the German people. Over and over, this is what the German people heard, and they became believers.

To control hecklers (usually communists) in his audiences, Hitler created the *Sturmabteilung*, the SA “Brown shirt Storm Troopers,” who enthusiastically traded blows and cracked heads so that *Der Fuhrer* could speak without interference. As the Nazi Party grew in strength, especially in the period following the world depression when millions of Germans were without jobs, so too did the ranks of the Storm Troopers. Many unemployed young men joined the SA and became fanatic followers of Adolf Hitler. The SA took on the communists “toe to toe,” and fought savagely to gain control of the streets and cities. Within the ranks of the SA, Hitler created a personal bodyguard, the *Schutzstaffel*, who wore distinct black uniforms with the “Death’s Head” emblem on the cap. Under the leadership of Reichsfuhrer Heinrich Himmler, this group of “bodyguards” became the dreaded SS, the security organization of the Nazi Party. The SS also stood guard at concentration camps that were built following Hitler’s appointment as Chancellor, and later they also stood watch at the eastern death camps. Within the SS was the *Gestapo* (**GE**heime **STA**ats **POL**izei, the “Secret State Police”), which terrorized Germany and eventually all of Nazi-occupied Europe. Thus, Hitler fashioned the apparatus to control the German people through fear and terror.

A combination of events brought Hitler to power. Under conditions that border on chaotic, when lawlessness is rife, extremists like Hitler thrive and prosper. The world depression destroyed the prosperity that existed through most of the 1920s. By 1931, millions were unemployed. The middle class lost their savings, and the threat of communism was a reality. Hitler was making promises that German people wanted to believe. In the Reichstag elections of 1931 and 1932, the Nazis emerged as Germany’s largest political party. President Hindenburg appointed Adolf Hitler Chancellor of Germany on January 30, 1933. Within a year, Hitler was granted dictatorial powers. When Hindenburg died in 1934, Hitler combined the offices of president and chancellor and held both titles. At memorial services for Hindenburg, the German *Wehrmacht* (Army) took a personal oath of allegiance to Hitler as Der Fuhrer. Soon after, Hitler announced that Germany was rearming and rejecting the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles that restricted Germany to an army of 100,000 officers and soldiers.

Adolf Hitler became Germany’s “man of the hour,” a leader to resurrect the nation’s greatness and power, bringing all Germans together. It was emblazoned in the Nazi slogan calling for “*Ein Staat, Ein Volk, Ein Fuhrer*” (One State, One People, One Leader). In 1936, the German *Wehrmacht* marched into the Rhineland (the border area between France and Germany), remilitarizing the area without protest from England or France. In 1938, Hitler annexed Austria (the *Anschluss*) and the next year persuaded France and England to sign the Munich Agreement giving Germany the Sudetenland with its three million Germans. Six months later, Hitler added Bohemia and Moravia as “protectorates” of the German Reich. Gambling that the western democracies would again cave in to his demands, Hitler turned against Poland, demanding the return of Danzig and the “Polish Corridor.” England and France now determined, made a stand and refused to appease Hitler. On the first day of September in 1939, Germany invaded Poland, and Hitler had his war.