

HOLOCAUST:

RESISTANCE, RESCUE AND SURVIVAL

Rise of Hitler and the Nazi Party

By Bradley Veile, Lakeside School, Idaho. Education Advisory Committee,
Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Center

On Easter Sunday 1889, Adolf Hitler was born in Austria to Klara and Alois Hitler. Young Adolf possessed the intellect to succeed in school, but did not complete high school. He moved to Vienna with plans to enter the Vienna School of Fine Arts. Hitler's admission request was rejected because his artwork was considered too stiff and lifeless. While in Vienna, Hitler was a vagrant surviving on the meager money his art provided.

In 1913, Hitler moved to Munich. Life in Munich was no better, but he was happier living in Germany. Hitler enlisted in the German military a year later when World War I (WWI) began. Corporal Hitler served as a dispatch runner. Through his military service Hitler came into contact with what would become the Nazi Party.

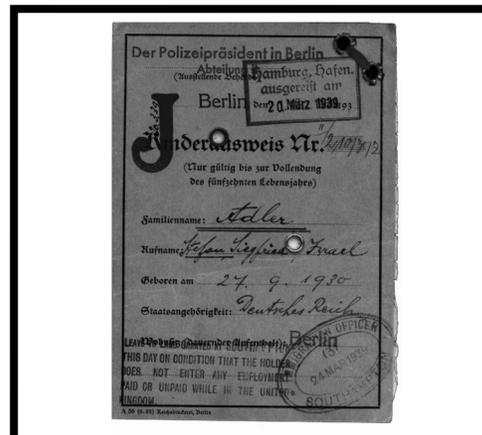
The Social Democrat Party controlled the Weimer Republic, as post-WWI Germany was known. The young Weimer government trained Hitler as an undercover spy bringing him into direct contact with the German Workers Party. Military commanders urged Hitler to join the party to test its potential usefulness in combating left-wing elements.

Hitler found the anti-communist, anti-Jewish views of party leaders compatible with his own. As director of propaganda, Hitler improved party visibility and rally attendance. His oratory skills became important to party appeal. "National Socialist" was added to the party name in hopes of attracting more people. The National Socialist German Workers (Nazi) Party was born. Hitler became party chairman in 1921.

By 1923, the German economy was devastated by runaway inflation. Hitler seized the opportunity to incite a putsch (violent overthrow) in Munich which failed. Hitler was arrested, tried and sentenced to five years in Landsberg Fortress. While in prison, he wrote a book, *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle) — revealing his goals for Germany.

Nazi support increased as the economy declined. In order to gain power, Hitler worked through the democratic election process. In 1928, the Nazis received only three percent of the vote. The next year the Nazi party blamed the country's problems (many of which were caused by the Great Depression) on the Social Democrats. In the 1930 election, the Nazis earned 107 seats in the Reichstag (German parliament). The Social Democrats remained in control but faced a Nazi challenge.

In 1932, the Nazi party received 37.3 percent of the vote placing 230 deputies in the Reichstag, more than any single party but not a majority. Paul von Hindenburg, the president, wanted to control the Nazis in government. Von Hindenburg did not like or trust Hitler, but he hoped that if he made him Chancellor (the second most powerful position in Germany) that Hitler would be able to control the other Nazis.



Passport for Steve A., a local Holocaust survivor and a member of the Holocaust Center's Speakers Bureau. Issued in 1938 in Germany. Notice the large "J" which, when viewed in color is red. On display at the Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Center.

The Nazis wanted to increase their influence and their support. In an effort to do this, they burned the Reichstag building, and blamed it on the Communists. After this event, Hitler convinced President von Hindenburg to declare a state of emergency, thereby suspending personal rights protected by the Constitution.

In 1933, the Nazis failed to win a majority in parliament. Hitler introduced a bill that would allow the Nazi party to decree laws without a vote in parliament for the next four years. This Enabling Act was supported by the Nazis, Conservatives and the Catholic Center Party. Many Communists and Socialists who opposed the bill were arrested before the vote. The bill passed. Soon after, Hitler outlawed all political parties, except the Nazi party.

Two events happened in 1934 that consolidated Hitler's power into a dictatorship. First, Hitler had SA (what does SA stand for?) leaders who might oppose him assassinated. In just one long night, June 30, at least 80 were arrested and shot. This came to be known as the "Night of Long Knives." Second, President von Hindenburg died on August 2. Hitler, already Chancellor, combined the positions of president and chancellor, making him dictator of Germany.

activities

1. Using the dates in today's article, create a timeline of events that led to Hitler's dictatorship and the Nazi reign of power in Germany. In your opinion, what was the single most relevant event (that you know about) that secured the Nazi's power so that they could initiate their plan to kill the Jewish population? Write a brief summary that explains and defends your choice.
2. Look through today's Seattle Times and locate an event/issue of relevance to our country's history or future. Follow the story for the next few weeks and create a timeline.

Published APRIL 21, 2005



Inspiring Students To Learn

Washington State
**HOLOCAUST
EDUCATION
RESOURCE CENTER**
teaching & learning for humanity

www.wsherc.org