

The Nazis Rise

SFX - a large crowd of people in a cavernous room; some murmuring, clinking stein glasses, and chairs slide across hard stone; on the other side of the room, a man addresses the crowd in indistinct German

In 1923, two weeks shy of Claus von Stauffenberg's sixteenth birthday, Bavaria's dignitaries assembled in the Beer Hall Cellar in Munich. The leader of the Bavarian government, Gustav Ritter von Kahr, droned on. Kahr was conspiring with others to overthrow the German government in Berlin and install a nationalist dictatorship.

Few paid any attention to a man at one side of the room, wearing a trench coat and leaning against a pillar. It was Adolf Hitler, leader of the fledgling Nazi party, impatient at Kahr's hesitation, aggrieved at the efforts of Kahr and his co-conspirators to sideline him, itching to achieve national power.

SFX - a group of men move through the crowd; people fuss; something large and metallic is positioned on the ground

MX in - snare march

Suddenly, dozens of brown-shirted stormtroopers from the Sturmabteilung, or SA, rushed into the hall. The SA were the Nazi Party's own paramilitary force, and at the behest of their leader, positioned a machine gun on the floor. Hitler stood forward, but with few noticing his presence, he jumped onto a table and fired a revolver into the ceiling.

SFX - a bullet is fired; the mood in the hall instantly changes;

'The national revolution has begun!' he shouted. 'This hall is surrounded by six hundred heavily armed men. No one may leave.'

The Beer Hall Putsch was under way.

MX in - Putsch march

Hitler was attempting to overthrow the government of Bavaria and preempt Kahr's coup to seize power across Germany. By the following day, it was clear the coup had misfired. Defiantly, Hitler and his supporters decided to march on the centre of the city.

SFX - on the streets; hundreds march, vehicles move into position; in the distance, indistinct German voices shout orders; bullets ring out

Police opened fire. Sixteen Nazis and three police were killed. Although Ludendorff stalked bravely on past the carbines, the rest of the Nazis fled in confusion. Hitler scuttled away in a motor car. He was arrested two days later. The Nazi party was banned. Hitler went to prison, his political ambitions in ruins.

MX in - theme

This is *Treason*, the incredible true story of Claus von Stauffenberg and the plot to assassinate Hitler.

Episode two, "The Nazis Rise".

MX fade

Hitler was sentenced to five years prison for his Beer Hall Putsch, but ended up only serving eight months. While inside, he wrote the first volume of *Mein Kampf* (which he initially wanted to call 'Four and a Half Years of Struggle against Lies, Stupidity and Cowardice') and gave thought to the reorganisation of the party. He announced that he would only seek power through legal means - but his stormtroopers still violently broke up opponents' rallies and beat up Jews and anyone else who crossed them.

In December 1924 the party received 3.0 percent of the national vote, and in May 1928 this dropped to a miserable 2.6 per cent.

At the same time, the fabric of German democracy was being undermined. Although moderate parties held the major share of *Reichstag* seats, President Hindenburg installed unrepresentative and aristocratic administrations.

With the coming of the Great Depression, Hindenburg unwisely bypassed the *Reichstag* by promulgating an emergency decree to force through proposed financial reforms. The *Reichstag* then voted to overturn the decree, leading Hindenburg to call a fresh election.

MX in - string drones

With the apparent inability of the divided Weimar Republic to cope with the situation, Hitler's electoral fortunes improved. Election of moderates had not led to governments people expected, so they voted for extreme parties. Those who disliked the Communists turned to the Nazis.

SFX - a rally; Hitler speech

Hitler, and those with him, proved adept at public relations, and made innovative use of the new medium of radio, as well as staging impressive massed rallies. He tapped into the resentments of unemployed returned soldiers still dreaming of German greatness.

In the election of September 1930, the Nazis received a respectable 18.3 percent of the vote.

Then in March 1932, Hitler gained prominence when he stood against Hindenburg as a presidential candidate. On the second round he received 36.8 per cent of the vote.

In a subsequent federal election the Nazi vote rose to 37.3 per cent, making them the largest party in the *Reichstag*. Although falling short of a majority, as leader of the party, Hitler held the best claim to be appointed chancellor.

After another election, held in an attempt to break a political deadlock, the Nazis' vote fell, but they maintained their lead as the largest party in the *Reichstag*.

On 30 January 1933, despite many warnings, Hindenburg finally agreed to install Adolf Hitler as chancellor. In response to the appointment, the Nazis staged torchlight processions – trumpeting the dawn of a new age for Germany.

SFX - a parade

As chancellor, Hitler was the leader of a coalition government. His ministry contained only two other Nazis. He failed to negotiate broad parliamentary support, and so Hindenburg dissolved the *Reichstag* and ordered elections for 5 March.

SFX - burning building

Less than a week out from that election, the immense Reichstag building, the focal point of Berlin's imperial district, was set on fire and destroyed. Only the shell remained. It was a shocking act of terrorism, immediately blamed on the Communists.

In the midst of the public alarm that followed, Hitler, relying on the precedent Hindenburg had already set, presented the President with an emergency decree, 'for the protection of the people and the state'.

Hitler said that with this decree he could

try enemies of the state legally and deal with them in a way that will put an end to conspiracies once and for all.

MX in - string ensemble drone

In the final week of the election campaign, the Nazis rode the panic about the fire shamelessly – loudly blaming the Communist Party and whipping up hysteria about the Communist menace.

Hermann Göring was Prussian minister for the interior – giving him control of security for almost two thirds of Germany. Immediately he installed Nazis in key positions. He ordered police not to interfere with Nazi brownshirts, but to shoot at Communists. He also established a force of 50,000 auxiliary police – mostly brawling Nazi thugs – who simply pulled a white armband over their brown uniforms to become the law.

At the election, having intimidated voters and violently attacked their opponents, the Nazis increased their vote to 43.9 per cent (the highest they had ever achieved). It was still short of a majority, but the Nazis had enough coalition support for Hitler to remain as chancellor.

MX in - German National Anthem

But Hitler wanted further power. By a series of measures, starting with the arrest of the 81 newly elected Communist deputies, he engineered the passage of the *Enabling Act*. This permitted him to rule by decree – subject only to the oversight of the increasingly senile

President Hindenburg. Once the *Enabling Act* passed, parliamentary democracy in Germany was at an end.

MX fade - German National Anthem deteriorates

With ruthless energy, the Nazis imposed their domination over all the power structures of the country.

MX in - Nazi theme

They set up parallel Nazi organisations shadowing the key State offices and ministries. Nazi stormtroopers marched into courts and turned Jewish judges (and others who resisted them in any way) off the bench.

SFX - Hitler speech and Nazi rally plays under this

At the May Day rally in 1933, Hitler spoke, reassuring workers of his respect for their rights. Next day, Nazi stormtroopers occupied the offices of trade unions and sent their organisers into concentration camps.

Goebbels rallied students in huge orgies of book burning. The Nazis took over the centres of learning. They even convoked the 'brown synod' which delivered the hierarchy of the Lutheran church into their hands.

When Hitler took the next step – outlawing all political parties other than the National Socialist German Workers' Party – Social Democrat deputies joined their Communist colleagues in concentration camps – or fled the country.

MX fade

The governing apparatus created by the Nazi revolution was anything but efficient. Rather, it was a Byzantine maze of complex administrative structures. Many vied with each other for control. All claimed loyalty to Hitler. This maze was exemplified by the several rival agencies that gathered and distributed intelligence around the Nazi network, making intrigue and power plays a constant feature of any government activity.

Hitler was careful to shelter big business, but the new government organised boycotts of Jewish businesses, and followed this with legislation preventing Jews working in the public service. Hitler engaged Hjalmar Schacht – recognised as one of the world's leading economists – to run the German economy. Schacht orchestrated Germany's economic revival.

MX in - downbeat drones

By June 1934, fifteen months after coming to power, Hitler knew that Hindenburg did not have long to live. Under the constitution, the chancellor could assume the role of president pending further elections. Hitler knew he would be able to succeed Hindenburg only if the Army agreed.

Meanwhile, the SA leader, Ernst Röhm, publicly pressed to have the Army incorporated into SA ranks. While the Army was strong, the SA numbered four million members, more twenty times the size of the Reichswehr. The Army would never accept incorporation. But Röhm kept pushing, even after Hitler, knowing he now needed the Army on side, warned him not to.

The so-called 'socialist' wing of the National Socialist party, the SA contained many working-class men, and many old soldiers. SA members had striven for years for a Nazi victory, disrupting opponents' meetings, beating and killing their enemies, and stalking the streets with loud propaganda in support of the Führer. With Hitler in power, their methods were no longer helpful – they were embarrassing, and even dangerous. The SA grew restless as the honours and jobs they had hoped for did not eventuate. Röhm was a bumptious, corrupt soldier. He was violent, self-indulgent, and without political subtlety.

Loudly, he demanded the SA's place in the sun, and flaunted its raw power. The revolution had come – why were all their disparate political expectations not being realised? Where was their glory in victory? Röhm began darkly preaching a 'second revolution'.

The Army would never support Hitler while this restless mob threatened the officers' place in the German state. Hitler would have to choose between the old comrades who had brought him to power, or the Army, which could buttress his position in Germany.

Heinrich Himmler and Hermann Goring also viewed the SA with distrust and contempt. Himmler was the colourless apparatchik who controlled the SS (the *Schutzstaffel* – or ‘guard echelon’). Originally a bodyguard unit, the SS had grown into an intelligence and policing arm for the party.

Göring – the flamboyant, vain World War I ace who founded the Gestapo and was addicted to morphine – saw the SA as a threat to his ambition to be Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. For Göring and Himmler, opportunities for greater influence in the Nazi state were restricted at every turn by the millions of assertive brownshirts who owed their allegiance to Röhm. And they began to fear that if the SA did take over, they could be eliminated politically – and personally.

MX in - Night of the Long Knives

SFX - (triggered at the appropriate place) car driving passed; propeller plane powering down; prison door slam; burst through wooden door; distant gunshots; running footsteps; close machine gunshots

Göring and Himmler began to compile lists of ‘unwanted persons’ to be liquidated. They pressed Hitler to act against the SA.

Knowing what he now must do, angry at the recalcitrance of Röhm and other SA leaders, he worked himself into a rage, and made arrangements for SS units to meet him in Munich.

The justification for what followed was that the SA were plotting a coup.

When Hitler landed in Munich at 4 in the morning, he summoned the leaders of the Munich SA. When General Schmid appeared before him, Hitler rushed up, tore off his badges of rank, and screamed at him: ‘You are under arrest and will be shot!’ Schmid joined the first of the SA leaders to be taken to Stadelheim Prison.

Hitler and his convoy of cars now raced to Bad Wiessee, where Hitler burst into Röhm’s bedroom, revolver in hand. He arrested the SA leader, shouting at him that he was a traitor. Other leaders of the SA were arrested. All were taken to Stadelheim Prison.

There, the SS murder squads began executing the prisoners. They left a revolver in Röhm's cell with a single shot in it, and told him to shoot himself. He refused.

In the three day orgy of violence that would later be known as the Night of the Long Knives, old scores were settled, including with lawyers who had acted against the Nazis, political enemies, and even rival SS officers. Up to 1000 were murdered.

General von Schleicher, the former chancellor of Germany and sworn enemy of Hitler's was gunned down, along with his wife, by the SS at their home. Röhm's deputy, Edmund Heines, was shot in Bavaria.

Meanwhile, in Munich, Röhm still refused to shoot himself. On the evening of Sunday 1 July SS officers opened his cell door, cried out 'Chief of Staff, prepare yourself!' and riddled him with bullets.

MX fade

The killing continued until the morning of Monday 2 July, when Hitler finally issued an order that there should be no further slaughter.

Hitler justified the purge in a nationally broadcast speech to the Reichstag, complete with his trademark mixed metaphors:

If anyone reproaches me and asks why I did not resort to the regular courts of justice, then all I can say is this. In this hour I was responsible for the fate of the German people, and thereby I became the supreme judge of the German people. I gave the order to shoot the ringleaders in this treason, and I further gave the order to cauterise down to the raw flesh the ulcers of this poisoning of the wells in our domestic life. Let the nation know that its existence – which depends on its internal order and security – cannot be threatened with impunity by anyone! And let it be known for all time to come that if anyone raises his hand to strike the State, then certain death is his lot.

The army was generally satisfied that the SA had been put in its place. One army general – General von Reichenau – had even helped with the logistical arrangements for the purge. The generals' complacency – if not complicity – was misplaced. They had not

triumphed over the SA, but merely exchanged one set of monsters for another. It was not the army, but the SS – now immensely powerful in the Nazi hierarchy – which was the beneficiary of this massacre.

MX in - string drones

Then, a month after the shooting stopped, President Hindenburg passed away. Immediately, as the constitution permitted in a temporary emergency, the chancellor assumed the office of president. Having combined the two offices in his person, Hitler took a title he had previously only used in the context of the party – ‘the Führer’ (or leader). At the initiative of General Blomberg, the Minister for Defence, officers and troops were marched onto parade grounds across the country and required to swear a new oath of loyalty – not to the nation or the people or the constitution, but to Hitler:

I swear before God this holy oath: I will give unconditional obedience to Adolf Hitler, the Führer of the Reich and of the German people, Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, and will be ready, as a brave soldier, to lay down my life at any time for this oath.

Hitler had made himself dictator of Germany.

SFX - Excerpts from *Triumph of the Will*

The following month the Nazi party staged the most spectacular Nuremberg Rally yet, filmed by Leni Riefenstahl in *Triumph of the Will*. Massed crowds, giant banners, solemn ritual and rousing speeches whipped the adoring disciples into a frenzy of devotion.

In 1935, Hitler consolidated his growing attacks on the Jewish population by enacting the so-called ‘Nuremberg laws’. Jews were stripped of their German citizenship. The laws prohibited marriages and extra-marital intercourse between ‘Jews’ and ‘Germans’ and also the employment of ‘German’ females under forty-five in Jewish households.

The editor of the German News Agency described the enactment of these laws as ‘a healing and useful deed, for Jewry, as for the Germans’. The Jewish community described the laws as ‘the heaviest of blows for the Jews in Germany’.

For Claus von Stauffenberg, this targeting of the Jewish population cut close to home. Claus had many close friends who were Jewish. His brother Alexander was in a close relationship with Melitta Schiller, and they would later marry. Melitta was Jewish. That September, Claus and a colleague were delegated as representatives of his regiment to attend an official Party Day lecture in Bamberg.

SFX - Julius Streicher

The speaker, the notorious Julius Streicher, launched into a castigation of the Jews – in a tone nothing short of pornographic. Claus could not abide this lurid rhetoric, and acted with breathtaking audacity.

A tall man, clad in his officer's uniform, he stood up and, accompanied by his colleague, strode out down the central aisle of the hall. At the exit he was intercepted by SS officers incensed at his conspicuous gesture. There was a verbal altercation, then he and his colleague elbowed their way past the black-clad cohorts.

MX in - high string drones

On 7 March 1936, Hitler announced that Germany would reoccupy the Rhineland – the area west of the Rhine and bordering France which had been demilitarised since the Versailles Treaty. Hitler bamboozled western leaders by announcing that the occupation was purely symbolic.

Hitler's generals knew Germany was not ready for military confrontation with the major powers. Had there been the slightest show of force from Britain or France, they would have forced Hitler to withdraw. In the end, apart from solemn hand wringing and protests from the Western Powers, nothing was done.

MX in - theme (short)

Hitler had shown that the western powers would not stand against determined action. He greatly enhanced his prestige and that of the Nazi regime, and to the world he proclaimed: 'All Germany's territorial ambitions have now been satisfied.'

It was a statement he would make about other conquests.

Treason is written and narrated by me, Brian Walters. Script editing, original music, sound design and editing is by Sam Loy.

You can learn more about Claus von Stauffenberg and German Resistance with the book, *Treason*. Available through Apple Books or the website brianwalters.com You can find a link in the episode's show notes.

All the very best, and may you find the inspiration you need in your life.