

Chapter 12

October 1945

The five recorders meet with me again in my living quarters at 7:30 P.M. They seem happy to answer my questions. I sometimes wonder about that. But, after all, they were not Nazi Party members, and they didn't like Hitler. They were recorders and have good memories.

I have two bottles of dessert wine that I know they like, and I fill their glasses. We engage in small talk for a while, as we settle into our chairs.

“We last discussed some of Hitler's characteristics. I thought this time we should talk about the early days. You were all members of the Stenographic Office of the Reichstag?”

“Yes,” says Krieger. “All except Thoet and Buchholz, who weren't there when Hitler first came into prominence—when he was convicted and sent to prison in Munich. They came a little later.”

“What did it require to get into the Stenographic Office?”

My question is to Krieger, the mentor of the group. Born February 16, 1887, he attended the University of Leipzig from 1906 to 1908, then studied political science at the University of Berlin until 1912. He began his stenographic career in 1907, while he was in school. In 1920 he joined the Stenographic Office of the Reichstag, and in 1941 he became its chief. The next year Hermann Goering called him to name the recorders for Hitler’s headquarters. The most experienced, he is also the most respected of the five recorders.

Krieger’s interest in precise facts is most helpful, and I take a sip of wine as I arrange my notebook to record his answer.

“First, there were competitive examinations for aspirants. They came from all over Germany and the competition was fierce. Then came the examination for associate members. Finally, the exam for membership, which was the hardest of all. Only a few made it,” says Krieger, slowly and without humor.

“What happened in Munich?” I ask Reynitz.

He moves forward in his chair: “I was a student at Berlin University. I read of Hitler’s arrest, conviction, and imprisonment because of the so-called ‘Beer Hall Putsch’ in 1923. He led his Nazis in a street revolt against the seat of the government of Bavaria in Munich. Before that, I paid little attention to the Nazi street fights with the Communists or to Hitler’s rallies and speeches, mostly in Bavaria, as reported in the press and on radio.”

“What did Hitler do after his imprisonment?” I ask Reynitz, as he seems knowledgeable.

“After 13 months in prison, Hitler began to make speeches to larger and larger crowds. I was assigned by the Stenographic Office of

the Reichstag to record his speech at the Sportpalast in Berlin in 1928. Thousands packed the big hall. A loud band was playing. Colorful banners were hoisted in neat rows. The dazzling spectacle of thousands of swastikas on armbands was startling, especially during such a drab time in Germany.”

“Did he have protection?” I look at Jonuschat.

Jonuschat sits forward in this chair and rubs his chin as he answers: “Hitler had protection at such rallies, which the Communists tried to break up. The SA [Sturmabteilung or stormtrooper units, also called Brownshirts] warded off the Reds at Nazi party gatherings. The SS [Schutzstaffel—protecting platoons or guard detachments, also called Blackshirts] protected Hitler’s person. They all wore uniforms and used sticks because firearms were then forbidden by law. These were the beginnings of his private, personal forces.”

I call on Reynitz and he begins: “All attention was on Hitler as he spoke. I could feel the excitement of the audience, and it was difficult to concentrate on my shorthand. The crowd was almost hysterical.”

“What was his appearance as he spoke?” I rise from my chair. The room is stuffy, so I open a window.

Reynitz carries on: “His appearance was quite plain. About five feet, nine inches tall, with a narrow mustache and sometimes unruly hair, he had striking blue eyes.”

“Did any of you see him up close?” I sit down again.

“The first time I saw him eye-to-eye was in 1930 or 1931,” recalls Hans Jonuschat. “Hitler was a witness to the aims and ends of the SA at a trial, and I, together with another recorder, had to write down his testimony. When the session was finished, he approached us, giving his hand to each, looking us full in the face.

“I do not know whether there was something demonic in his eyes, but I should not have liked to work near him for fear of losing the power of my own will and in the end approving everything he did. But maybe he only intended or was accustomed to looking in such a way at strangers so as to change them into blind followers.”

“Go on.” I flip to a new page in my notebook.

“When, after 11 years, I had to work in his presence, my former impression had vanished, and I did not suffer myself to be constrained by his spell. It struck me, however, that he occasionally, when talking to a person, seemed to look not into his listener’s eyes but through his eyes at a point far behind,” concludes Jonuschat, sipping his wine and leaning back into the davenport.

“What was the effect of his speeches?” I look at Reynitz.

“At that rally in 1928,” Reynitz says, “and at others that I recorded later, it was obviously his speeches—not what he said so much as how he said it. Hitler, all of a sudden, discovered that he could hypnotize the audience. He was forceful and he shouted at times, like a man in a rage.”

“That’s a good description,” Jonuschat agrees.

“What did he say? How did he say it?” I ask Jonuschat.

“He used the common man’s language and made promises he knew people wanted to hear. He was a politician, and he knew people wanted a leader to bring order to the country. Politics was the only job he had had since leaving World War I. Many people thought he could save Germany from Communism, which Germans feared. Also, many thought he could restore national pride.”

“What was the effect on the crowd?” I look at Reynitz.

He moves forward in his chair and says, “As he shouted promises,

he received salutes from the audience—right palms upraised and the cries ‘Sieg Heil’ [Hail Victory]. The excitement always increased and some people fainted. Scuffles on the edges of the crowd occurred as the SA fought the Communists, who were always trying to break up the rally.”

“That’s interesting. Could you tell me more?”

“You must remember that the tension and spell on the audience came from several factors—the large crowd, the colorful pageantry, and the loud band music played to stir up the crowd. Then came Hitler’s forceful speech and the roar of ‘Sieg Heil,’ which helped the audience mesmerize itself. Hitler’s rallies were a contrast to the dull political life in Germany before he came on the scene.” Reynitz leans back in his chair.

“What promises did he make?” I am eager to know, as this had a bearing on his later successes. I glance at Jonuschat.

“He said he would put the unemployed to work. Most in the audiences were unemployed or had menial or part-time work. That promise was immensely popular. Germany’s economy was in a shambles after World War I. There was runaway inflation until 1924, then a growing depression,” says Jonuschat, warming to the subject. He moves forward in his seat and continues.

“He promised to get rid of the huge reparations imposed by treaties after World War I and said he would regain territories and colonies taken away by the treaties. Besides, he would gain Lebensraum so that Germans could live better.

“He appealed to nationalism and hammered on the theme that true Germans were the master race in Europe. He ranted against Gypsies and other ‘undesirables.’ He said if there was a war in Europe, it

would not be the Germans, but the Jews, who would be destroyed,” Jonuschat concludes and leans back.

“What did you think of his promises?” I ask Reynitz as I get up from my chair and pace, amazed at what I am hearing.

“When I read the transcripts of my notes of his speeches, I saw that he never said how he would fulfill his promises. His other themes, like Lebensraum, master race, and the destruction of the Jews, didn’t make sense to me. From conversations with others, I gathered that most people were not moved much by those themes if they understood them.

“His themes about putting people to work and regaining lost territories had the greatest appeal—even to those who had jobs. Those two themes worked together and drew the noisiest responses from the crowds at his speeches,” says Reynitz as he stands. Two of the others follow, as if for a seventh-inning stretch.

Catching the spirit, I take the time to fill their glasses with wine.

“This is delicious,” says Krieger. The others lift their glasses toward me, indicating their approval.

“Glad you like it.” When all sit down, I change the subject.

“About the Communists—did they give up?”

“Not in the least. Many riots in the streets occurred between the Communists and the Nazis. They beat on each other with sticks and the buckle ends of belts. The uniformed SA and SS were growing rapidly, holding their own, and winning in the street riots. Hitler stirred up people by leading marches, ending with a rally where he made a fiery speech. I was assigned to record some of his speeches. Germany was near anarchy, and martial law was declared in some areas by President Paul von Hindenburg,” concludes Reynitz.

“What did he say about World War I?” I turn to Jonuschat. He sits up straight, the eyes of the others upon him.

“Hitler had special appeal to World War I military and other leaders with his tirades against the ‘November Criminals.’ He was referring to the politicians, not the military chiefs, who arranged and signed the Armistice of November 11, 1918. He cried that these criminals agreed to the unbearable burden of reparations to the Allies,” Jonuschat explains.

“I suppose that appeal was popular?” I interject.

“That appeal had two impacts. The people agreed that reparations couldn’t be paid at a time of deepening depression. The World War I military chiefs kept claiming that they hadn’t lost that war. They said politicians had stolen victory from them,” he continues.

“Hitler vowed he would regain territories lost by treaties after World War I. This would provide more employment. National pride was aroused in many people when he said this. And this promise won even more support from World War I military chiefs who became important to him later on.”

“Was he an effective politician?” I direct my question to Reynitz. He leans forward and rubs his nose.

“From what I know about how he gained power as Der Fuehrer, he was an extremely clever politician. His actions and speeches, and his writings in *Mein Kampf* [*My Struggle*] show that he appealed to the masses through their emotions—to their hearts, not to their minds. He was attuned to the people.” Reynitz comes through again. From their facial expressions, I can see the others agree.

“Did he dislike anyone?” I ask Reynitz, not knowing what the question might bring.

“He disliked professionals, like teachers, journalists, engineers, and lawyers, because they were trained to look at both sides of an issue and might come out in a gray area and take no stand,” ends Reynitz.

“That’s very interesting. Shows his character. How did he use propaganda?” I ask Krieger.

He always takes time to answer, and he speaks calmly now: “Hitler and his close associates used propaganda to take a position on an issue. By constantly repeating a position, even if false, the propaganda took on credibility. The Americans and British were saying in their newspapers that this was use of the Big Lie. He was good at it.” Again, I see the others agree.

“The Weimar Republic was still in power, wasn’t it?”

Krieger answers in his usual manner, not bothering to move from his relaxed position: “The government was ineffective. President Paul von Hindenburg was old and really a figurehead. Chancellor Heinrich Brüning was losing general support—he was ousted in May 1932. There was extreme confusion in German politics.” The others take great interest in this subject. They watch Krieger as he continues.

“Keep in mind the craving of Germans for social order, which requires strong leadership and a chain of authority. It is inbred from a long history of rulers: monarchs and emperors. The last of them fled at the end of World War I. Germany had great difficulty adjusting to the democratic system of the Weimar Republic. The system was constantly vilified by the monarchists, Communists, and the Nazis. No one seemed to be in charge. There were also too many political parties.

“The inbred idea of social order in Germany starts in the family. The father rules; the oldest boy rules his younger siblings. In local government, the burgomaster rules, and so on up the line.

“Germany was ripe for a strong leader, and Hitler was eager to be the leader. More than that, he was driving to be the dictator of Germany, just as he had achieved dictatorship of the Nazi party,” concludes Krieger. He stands and walks around a bit after his long dissertation. The others watch as he paces the floor, agreeing with him almost to the point of applause.

“Did Hitler ever run for office?” I look at Jonuschat.

“Yes. The weak government and economy were natural material for his speeches. He repeatedly assured the people that everyone would have a job.

“He said he would get rid of the Communists, the crippling strikes, and the labor unions. Industrialists openly supported his ideas and helped finance the Nazi party when it was increasing its seats in the Reichstag, especially in 1930. He had support from both ends of the economic scale, although he was an extreme rightist,” Jonuschat says as the others nod.

“You’re so right.” Krieger chimes in.

I look at Krieger, and he adds, “The Nazi party continued to win state elections and more seats in the Reichstag, while the Communists were falling far behind. By 1932, the party doubled its seats and Goering was elected president of the Reichstag. But the party itself never controlled a majority of seats.

“In the national election in 1932 Hitler ran against President Hindenburg. He received less than half of the votes and lost, but it demonstrated he was gaining.” Krieger is pleased with his answer.

“How did Hitler become chancellor?” I look at Krieger again.

“Hitler finally gained power by a combination of persuasion and relentless pressure. The uniformed SA and SS troopers more and more

filled the main streets in the cities, and there was fear of civil war. There was pressure in the Reichstag and maneuvers by its president, Hermann Goering, Hitler's strong man.

"Pressure was put on the cabinet and on President Hindenburg, who, though he disliked Hitler, finally gave in and appointed Hitler chancellor on January 30, 1933. Up to that point Hitler had taken steps that had the appearance of legal means, apparently to achieve acceptance by the people," Krieger finishes. The others are strongly with him on this.

"It's getting very late," I say, looking at my watch. "I'm sorry to keep you so long, but all of the discussion is so interesting. The indictment has been served on the 40 defendants in the Dachau case, so the trial should begin soon. Then you will have a little more time to tell me about Hitler. I'll call you."

Several of the recorders stretch and look at their watches. Then they shake their heads and stand up.

"I want to thank you for your insights into Hitler's mind and actions," I say as they leave.