

Chapter 16

November 1945

As the trial progresses, I continue to meet with Hitler's recorders after working hours and on weekends. One Sunday, beginning about 11:00 A.M., they arrive at my living quarters. We sit down in the overstuffed chairs, and everyone seems relaxed.

"In our last discussion, we left off where Hitler had completed his first year. I would like to go on from there," I say.

"I'll start," volunteers Krieger, and he slowly begins. "Starting in 1934, Hitler demanded arms equality with other nations, mainly Britain and France, who were traditional enemies. He spoke on the radio for all nations to hear. He said the German people could not be denied that right. He said nothing of restrictive World War I treaties."

Krieger is intelligent and to the point. He goes on: "That demand was appealing to Germans who were unemployed and had no skills. For many of them, their last jobs were as soldiers in World War I.

They wanted to be soldiers again, as they supported Hitler. The military buildup could be seen in construction of new factory and barracks buildings.”

“What happened next?” I look at Jonuschat. He seems ready to talk.

“Hitler ordered purges of the SA leadership in June 1934. In the dead of night, SS troops went to the SA headquarters and shot Ernst Roehm, chief of the SA, along with a large number of SA officers and some innocent civilians. It was widely publicized, and Hitler reported the purge in a major radio speech.

“Hitler said that Roehm was plotting to overthrow him, even trying to have army units join the SA’s four million in uniform. It was necessary to resort to the purge of the SA leadership to ‘maintain order and defend the nation.’ He also said the SS killed under a hundred SAs, but later reports by others said the total was much higher.” Jonuschat pauses.

Jonuschat is obviously a well-educated man. He tells me he was born in 1901 in East Prussia, then moved to Berlin, graduated from high school, and earned a doctorate in political science in 1926. He entered the Stenographic Office of the Reichstag, served in the German army in 1941, and in September 1942 was recruited to Hitler’s headquarters. He adds much to our discussions.

“In the United States, it was broadcast that this killing of Roehm and his henchmen showed Hitler’s lust for power,” I interject.

“May I say something?” asks Reynitz, sitting on the edge of his chair. “This purge was an example of his nihilist view of the value of man. The SA quickly dropped to about one-fourth of its highest membership. Some SA members, who were physically fit and true to

the Nazi ideology, were permitted to join the SS, which was still a voluntary organization under Heinrich Himmler. Some units of the SA continued under new leaders to be used for dirty work, like persecuting Jews, Gypsies, and Communists.”

“Good observation, Reynitz. Couldn’t have said it better. Then what?” I ask.

“Shortly after the SA purge, President Hindenburg died, on August 2, 1934. I remember this date well. Hitler quickly combined the offices of president and chancellor and seized complete power as the head of government and the armed forces,” Reynitz continues.

“Hitler called for a plebiscite when he took full power. Almost 90 percent of the people voted in favor. I don’t know who counted the vote, but I feel sure Hitler would not have called for a vote unless he was sure of the outcome. He wanted to show Germans and those in neighboring countries that ‘I have the people behind me.’”

“You certainly have a grasp of the facts. That is tremendously important. Please go on.” The others eye him approvingly.

“In March 1935, compulsory military training was announced—‘to take the necessary measure to protect the Reich,’ Hitler said. Those who had military experience volunteered, enlisted without waiting to be drafted, in the hope of early promotions. Most others were not complaining. They were accustomed to military duties. Some did object, like a tailor in my neighborhood in Berlin. He printed handbills and put them in letterboxes. The handbills stated that Hitler was preparing for war and everyone should stop him before it was too late. He was arrested and put to work as a tailor in a concentration camp, making uniforms,” Reynitz remembers. He is a master of the facts, and I encourage him to continue.

“Almost immediately after the draft order, France and Britain denounced unilateral violations of World War I treaties. The League of Nations also objected. I read this in English newspapers. Hitler responded by saying that Germany wanted peace and that another world war would be a frightful upheaval. This was typical of Hitler—saying the opposite of what he intended. He was preparing for war.” Reynitz leans back in his chair and relaxes.

The others nod in agreement.

“How was he able to finance the preparation? He was in debt: how could he find the money?” I look at Jonuschat, who has a good memory.

“He had Hjalmar Schacht, president of the Reichsbank. He was made finance minister and, among other things, he invented the ‘Mefo Bills’ backed by armament companies and the government, good for five years. They were merely promises to pay in the future, strange for Germans, who were accustomed to buying something only when the money was in hand. These certificates were used by factories to buy supplies and soon were being circulated like money.”

“That is important. Was that the first time that happened?” I ask Jonuschat.

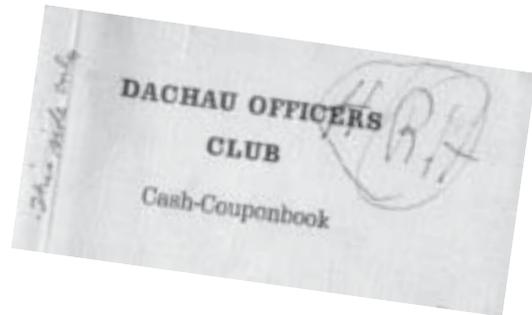
“Yes,” he replies, as he slumps into the davenport again.

“What happened next?” I inquire of Krieger.

He scratches his head and says, “As we’ve said, Hitler did everything step by step, testing the people and also other countries. And he was being successful. In September 1935 he issued a decree called the ‘Nuremberg Laws.’ It took from Jews almost all rights of citizenship and prohibited them from marrying Germans. There was no economic or national security reason for those laws. They came from

Hitler's hatred of Jews as a boy in Austria. Jews were victims of his propaganda from the time he came into public view until his last days."

I look at my watch—it's 1:00 P.M. "Let's break for lunch," I say. "I'll take you to the officers' club, where they permit us to have guests."



The recorders put on their topcoats and follow me to the club.

"This is the first time I've been to the officers' club," says Thoet.

"I hope you will like it," I reply.

At the club, the maitre'd, who is dressed in a tuxedo, says, "Table for six? Right this way." He seats us by a window and asks, "Would you like some wine?"

I order two bottles of Liebfraumilch.

The club is huge and well furnished. The waiters wear short black jackets, black bow ties, and black trousers. We look at the menu, and the waiter tells us the specialty of the day is rack of venison, with small potatoes, gravy, and mixed vegetables.

"That sounds good," says Reynitz. "I'll try it."

The others, including me, order the same.

The waiter brings the wine, which is delicious. The meal is more so. The deer in the Alps near Munich are small, about two-thirds the size of the whitetails in the United States.

"This is great," I say, and the others readily agree. "This is the most tender meat I've ever eaten."

When we finish, they thank me profusely.

"Shall we continue where we left off?" I ask.

“We are quite willing,” says Krieger. I am glad to hear that.

We saunter back to my quarters, about two blocks away. It is a cool day. At my residence, we all take the seats we had before.

“I’m grateful to you all,” I say.

“We’re grateful to you for the outstanding lunch.” Krieger pats his stomach, and the others nod.

“The club always has a special on Sundays.” Then after settling down, I ask, “Who would like to start?”

“I will,” says Jonuschat. “Hitler invaded the Rhineland in March 1936. This was his first major military action. It was a bold move, even though France had withdrawn from the area some time before.”

“How big is the Rhineland? Why was it important to Hitler?”

“It is quite large, lying just north of Austria, with the Rhine River and Stuttgart at its center. The area was important to Germany’s economy because of its coal, industry, and barging,” Jonuschat continues. “It had been granted to France by the Versailles Treaty, and Hitler was not yet prepared for full-blown war. He ordered withdrawal if France fought back.”

“Then it really was a bold move.” I continue to look at Jonuschat.

“When the invasion occurred, Hitler said, ‘The area belongs to Germany, and my action is merely symbolic. Our territorial claims have now been satisfied.’ While foreign countries complained, they did nothing, just as Hitler had surmised. They were drained economically from World War I and had no stomach for war. The German people were ecstatic, hailing this first military action as bloodless.”

“How did Hitler advise his countrymen?”

Jonuschat continues: “Even as his troops were occupying the Rhineland, Hitler called the Reichstag into session to announce his ac-

tion and, of course, to get worldwide attention. It was two years before the next bold move occurred. Meanwhile, he was building his military forces.

“The Germans rejoiced, but there was some fear that France would retaliate and perhaps start another war. Hitler gained much in prestige because not a shot was fired. All of this was freely and gleefully discussed in Germany.” Jonuschat concludes his narration and relaxes.

Then Reynitz says, “Other countries did nothing except to denounce violations of the treaties. The British press made statements to the effect that, ‘The Germans are only going back into their own country.’ Foreign reaction, I and others thought, was mild, probably because no country, including Germany, wanted war. I would guess none was prepared for war.

“All European countries were practically disarmed after World War I. On reflection, I think the gap until World War II was a recess. World War I had damaged the economies of all participants, and the treaties following it bore the seeds for World War II, brought to fruition in the person of Hitler,” Reynitz says, scratching his head.

Then he recalls: “He ordered fortifications along the long border from Switzerland to the Netherlands. It was later called the Siegfried Line, after a hero in German mythology. It was also called the Westwall, at least the northern extension of it. It was reported that the economy in the Rhineland had come to life, putting people to work.”

“What next?” I ask Jonuschat. Sitting on the edge of his chair, he seems ready to speak.

“I read reports of the Spanish Civil War in the British newspapers, which carried views of other countries as well. In Germany, nothing

was reported by the controlled press and radio. Nothing was said about killed or wounded Germans,” he recalls.

“The secret was out when wounded Germans were brought home. Meanwhile, there were jokes making fun of Spain. A man going to the bathroom would say, ‘Permit me, I have to go to Spain.’ Or if a friend wasn’t seen for a while, a remark would be made that, ‘He is probably in Spain.’” Jonuschat leans back, satisfied with his recollection.

I look at Reynitz: “What went on in Spain?”

“Soon it was openly revealed that German planes and tanks were supporting General Francisco Franco’s rebels. Spain was the testing ground for a technique called *Blitzkrieg* [lightning war], as we learned later. When Hitler’s conquests started, there was wide publicity on how the Blitzkrieg worked. It was a combination of planes, tanks, and motorized troops moving forward as fast as possible.

“When Franco won, Hitler ordered victory celebrations in Germany. There were large parades in Berlin, hailing the victory. Government workers and others had the day off. Many used the time for visits and family picnics.” Reynitz has a fantastic memory. He sits erect, pulls his earlobe, and continues:

“In 1937, reports in the world press were telling of purges in Russia, of opponents of the Red regime, and of hundreds of military officers considered by Stalin to be unreliable. Yet Stalin had no greater admirer than Hitler. At war headquarters, I remember his saying several times: ‘I cannot allow myself to thoroughly purge the army as Stalin did, to relieve it of the damned intelligentsia.’”

Jonuschat picks it up: “Hitler had a great ego and always tried to be popular with his countrymen. This would restrain him from large army purges. Yet, the two leaders were alike in many ways. They both

wore simple uniforms. Each permitted only one political party. They got rid of their political opponents by use of concentration camps. Both were dictators, Hitler probably more so than Stalin, who had to answer to party bodies. Both believed the ends justified any means. Both banned any type of people's organization. Both indoctrinated school children. Both believed in spreading their own ideologies into other countries. Both ruled the military forces. The goal of both was to dominate the world."

Then Reynitz says, "I could say the same for Mussolini, dictator of Italy since 1920. Hitler originally admired him."

Krieger finishes it up: "In November 1937, Germany, Italy, and Japan signed the Anti-Comintern Pact [Anti-Communist International Pact]. It was widely publicized. The announcements said the Communist International was a danger in both East and West and a threat to peace and order. The world press said this pact was disturbing in that it showed a potential for military adventures. I read these reports from many countries in the British papers.

"You will remember that Japan started its expansion by invading Manchuria and China in 1931 and that Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1935. So, in 1937, when the three expansionist-minded dictators joined hands, many countries were concerned." The others are amazed at Reynitz's recall. They look at him with astonishment and pride.

"I think this is a good place to end our discussion. Your information is terrific. I really appreciate your taking the time to share it with me," I say.

"Auf Wiedersehen," says Krieger, and they leave with broad smiles.



Victims identify defendants Wilhelm Wagner, above, and Christof Knoll, below.

