

Chapter 23

December 1945

The recorders gather at 1:00 P.M. on Saturday at my living quarters.

“I’d like to know a little more about what was happening to the Jewish people,” I say.

Reynitz shows interest at once: “You will have to remember that they were Germans first and Jews second. They were decent people. I had several friends who were Jews, and my doctor was one.”

“What did Hitler do next about the Jews?” I ask Reynitz.

“The pressure on Jews to leave Germany continued, by all the means we talked about before. In December 1941, Hitler issued a decree, the *Nacht und Nebel Erlass* [Night and Fog Decree]. The effect was to legalize the action of Nazi organizations in taking remaining Jews from their homes at night, whole families, and putting them on transportation to move them out of Germany. The decree merely for-

malized what had been going on for some time. I had noticed myself that a Jewish family would be at home on one day, and the next day they were gone. Mostly to Poland, I learned later.” Reynitz stands.

“How were they restricted in their activities in Germany?”

“They had been forbidden to leave their residences without police permit to buy clothes, to shop at any time except between 4:00 and 5:00 P.M., to smoke tobacco, to use public telephones, to keep pets, to have their hair cut by an Aryan barber, or to own any electric appliances, record players, typewriters, or bicycles,” Reynitz recalls and sits.

“Why was that done? It seems rather silly.” I turn a page in my notebook. Reynitz still sits erect.

“Hitler’s hatred for the Jews was unbounded. He tried to drive them out of Germany by all kinds of incredible decrees. When he acquired territory outside of Germany, like Poland, he put them in concentration camps such as Treblinka and Auschwitz.”

“What else?”

“The Final Solution—extermination of the Jews—began late in 1941, was made official in 1942. Hitler’s prediction of this action, stated in *Mein Kampf* 16 years earlier, became reality,” Reynitz recalls. The others look at him with admiration.

“Were there any exceptions to death?” I ask Jonuschat.

“The exception was the use of able-bodied Jewish men and women in forced labor, for making armaments. When they became too weak to work, they were taken to the gas chamber, supposedly for delousing and showers, then to the crematory. We learned all this later from witnesses who were transferred from eastern camps when the Russians were advancing westward. Pregnant women were killed at once. The same fate befell children not fit for work.”

Witness to Barbarism



Still smoking trench barracks and the awful result of the Nazis' intentional fires.



“What was the point of Final Solution?” I stand to ask.

“Hitler said in *Mein Kampf* that there would be no Jews left in Europe. He was a murderer, plain and simple. Killing never bothered

Witness to Barbarism



The American army calls on the help of German civilians in the nearby town of Landsberg to remove the burned bodies of Jewish prisoners for decent burial.



him. I don't know how else to put it," he answers. The other recorders all watch him, finding no fault with what he says.

"Can you go on?"

"This short description does not include the beatings, starvation, torture, and killing of Jews in the camps by the SS guards or the use of hundreds of Jews for medical experiments in several camps. But the gas-and-burn method became the way to exterminate more Jews quickly and with less debris—clothing and bodies—for disposal.

"Hitler also ordered extermination of the Polish intelligentsia, nobility, and clergy, I learned later . . . I have the feeling that Hitler's two wars—the senseless genocide of Jews and his military conquests—were inconsistent. Neither supported the other." Jonuschat leans back in his chair and clasps his hands behind his head. The others approve.

"Did he say anything about this publicly?" I inquire of Thoet.

He replies: "Concerning the Jews, Hitler said, in effect, at a military conference, 'They rightfully hate us, just as much as we hate them. When the war is over they will be uprooted from Europe.' However, Germans were not informed about the systematic genocide, and no foreign newspapers were permitted in Germany after the war started in Poland in 1939."

"Did Hitler meet with anyone about the Jews?" I sit down again, listening to Thoet.

"Starting in December 1942, when he was at war headquarters, the chief of the SS, Himmler, had private, unrecorded meetings with Hitler before or after the military conferences," concludes Thoet.

"This may be a good place to end this discussion. It is almost time for dinner. I want to thank all of you for sharing your memories."

With that our meeting closes.



Wilhelm Keitel, Hermann Goering, Adolf Hitler, and Martin Bormann, walking abreast at Wolfsschanze. Count Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg, later involved in a plot to kill Hitler, walks behind (far left).