



JUNE 30,
1934 :
NIGHT OF
THE LONG
KNIVES

In Germany, Nazi leader Adolf Hitler orders a bloody purge of his own political party, assassinating hundreds of Nazis whom he believed had the potential to become political enemies in the future. The leadership of the Nazi Storm Troopers (SA), whose four million members had helped bring Hitler to power in the early 1930s, was especially targeted. Hitler feared that some of his followers had taken his early “National Socialism” propaganda too seriously and thus might compromise his plan to suppress workers’ rights in

exchange for German industry making the country war-ready.

In the early 1920s, the ranks of Hitler's Nazi Party swelled with resentful Germans who sympathized with the party's bitter hatred of Germany's democratic government, leftist politics, and Jews. In November 1923, after the German government resumed the payment of war reparations to Britain and France, the Nazis launched the "Beer Hall Putsch"—their first attempt at seizing the German government by force. Hitler hoped that his

nationalist revolution in Bavaria would spread to the dissatisfied German army, which in turn would bring down the government in Berlin. However, the uprising was immediately suppressed, and Hitler was arrested and sentenced to five years in prison for high treason.

Sent to Landsberg jail, he spent his time dictating his autobiography, *Mein Kampf*, and working on his oratorical skills. After nine months in prison, political pressure from supporters of the Nazi Party forced his release. During the

next few years, Hitler and the other leading Nazis reorganized their party as a fanatical mass movement that was able to gain a majority in the German parliament—the *Reichstag*—by legal means in 1932. In the same year, President Paul von Hindenburg defeated a presidential bid by Hitler, but in January 1933 he appointed Hitler chancellor, hoping that the powerful Nazi leader could be brought to heel as a member of the president's cabinet.

However, Hindenburg underestimated Hitler's political

audacity, and one of the new chancellor's first acts was to use the burning of the Reichstag building as a pretext for calling general elections. The police, under Nazi Hermann Goering, suppressed much of the party's opposition before the election, and the Nazis won a bare majority. Shortly after, Hitler took on absolute power through the Enabling Acts. In 1934, Hindenburg died, and the last remnants of Germany's democratic government were dismantled, leaving Hitler the sole master of a nation intent on war and genocide.

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