

Blood Purge



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No matter what brutalities they might commit nor how queerly they might act, Nazi Storm Troop leaders under Adolf Hitler have always banked on his reputation of never letting an old comrade down.

Compared to the refined abruptness of Benito Mussolini or the violence of Josef Stalin in disposing of defective political tools, Adolf Hitler was, until last week, the Gentle Dictator. The accepted Brown House axiom "Once your friend. Der Führer is always your friend!" remained a potent Storm Troop recruiting slogan. One had only to scan the greedy, sensual, plug-ugly face of Storm Troop Chief of Staff Ernst Roehm; one had only to reflect that all Germany knew of his bull-like philandering with effeminate young men (TIME, March 20, 1933), to decide that since Chancellor Hitler stomached Captain Roehm there was probably no comrade he would not stomach. Historically last week Adolf Hitler retched at last and in his retching there was blood.

Fatefully the smudge-mustached little Chancellor left Berlin by air one day last week for Essen, deep plans and savage suspicions gyrating in his brain. With him flew spectacular Reichsminister General Hermann Wilhelm Göring, the bull-necked Nazi war ace who controls Prussia's Secret Police. They discussed recent Nazi squabbles in Berlin which to both seemed disgraceful — and ominous.

The trouble involved Germany's three unofficial armies: the 2,500,000 common S. A. Storm Troops in brown uniforms; the 200,000 S. S. Storm Troops in black uniforms who constitute the picked, super-drilled Nazi Praetorian Guard; and the 200,000 grey-clad Stahlhelm or war veterans organization and led by onetime Soda-water Tycoon Col. Franz Seldte.

By order of Chancellor Hitler the S. A. boys were to turn in their uniforms July 1 and take a month's vacation. Already on vacation was Storm Troop Chief of Staff Ernst Roehm at his rustic snuggery near Munich. But in Berlin his sub-comrades kept pestering the Chancellor with demands that he dissolve the rival Stahlhelm. Despite the fact that Storm Troopers hooted at Stahlhelm Leader Seldte and stoned his bodyguards a few weeks ago the Storm Troopers based their demand on the obscure stabbing of one of their district leaders by a Stahlhelm official in Pomerania. When Herr Hitler refused last week to dissolve the Stahlhelm and accorded Col. Seldte a friendly audience Berlin Storm Troop leaders were stupid enough to mutter openly against Der Führer and arouse the

suspicions of General Göring's Secret Police.

In flight with Hitler to Essen, Göring showed Hitler certain other suspicious evidence gathered by his Secret Police. The Chancellor and the General then conferred with one of the Nazi Party's earliest and richest backers, Dr. Gustav Krupp von Bohlen and Halbach who led Der Führer proudly through the Krupp Works. Chancellor Hitler, after inspecting Westphalian labor camps, flew on to Bonn. General Göring flew back to Berlin. "Have my plane made ready," he commanded mysteriously.

Taking off in the dead of night, Chancellor Hitler flew from Bonn to Munich where he arrived at 4 a. m. He accused Storm Troop leaders of treacherously plotting a coup against himself, brandished General Göring's proofs under their noses, flew into a passion and tore the Nazi insignia off their brown uniforms. S. S. troops with machine guns meanwhile bottled up the S. A. leaders in Chancellor Hitler's trap. Then leaping into a car the Chancellor dashed for queer Captain Roehm's luxurious snuggery.

According to official communiques there was no one in bed with Captain Roehm when Chancellor Hitler burst in, but in the adjoining bedroom Nazi Police Chief Edmund Heines of Breslau was nabbed with a young storm trooper between the sheets. "Certain sights were disclosed in the seizing of the rebels" read the communique "so pitiful that all feelings of compassion must end. . . . Chief of Staff Ernst Roehm's well known unhappy malady was gradually becoming unbearable, driving him into severest conflicts with his own conscience. . . . Der Führer has ordered this plague ruthlessly stamped out."

In the stamping out which followed scores of Storm Troop leaders, brownshirt potentates whose word has been law in their bailiwicks, were either shot by firing squads or were left alone in prison with a revolver which they used to commit suicide. The chancellor tried his hardest to make Col. Roehm shoot himself, twice sent him a pistol which came back with the defy, "If I am shot Hitler will have to do it himself!"

"Why should I honor a traitor by shooting him!" fumed the Dictator. After long hours of bickering delay Prisoner Roehm was shot in the back next day by a firing squad. Since Storm Troop "daggers of honor" are engraved In Steadfast Faith To Roehm they were ordered broken, and the display windows of Chancellor Hitler's personal newsorgan abruptly stopped advertising the Autobiography of Ernst Roehm.

In Berlin the pouncing of Captain Göring's Secret Police was savage in the extreme. Riot trucks bristling with rifles dashed up and down the main streets while newspapers were rigidly prevented from printing a word about what was going on. No Cabinet Minister seemed to be trusted for the offices of all were occupied by Secret Police and S. S. Storm Troops who shot an aide of Vice Chancellor von Papen as they swept in. This aide, Herr von Bose, was officially reported a suicide until it could no longer be concealed that his death was due to six bullets. With rumors crackling that the Vice Chancellor himself had been killed correspondents rushed to his home where he was said to be in "protective custody." S. S. Storm Troops guarded the house but Reichswehr soldiers, sent by President von Hindenburg to guard his favorite statesman, stood watch inside. Two days later Lieut.-Colonel von Papen offered to resign. General Göring was expected to take his post if Hitler accepted the resignation.

Both Reichsbank President Dr. Hjalmar Schacht and ex-Crown Prince Wilhelm denied over the telephone rumors that they had been shot. But the Government announced ominously that "a few more executions may soon be made known" and it was established that a Nazi trooper had shot the Chief of the Catholic Action Society, Herr Erich J. G. Klausener, charged with having been slated to be Minister of Transportation in some conspirator's government.

The crowning sensation of last week's killings came when Secret Police pushed into the swank suburban mansion of General Kurt von Schleicher, immediate predecessor of Adolf Hitler as Chancellor and the officer to whom it fell in 1918 to tell All Highest Wilhelm II that his army was no longer faithful to the Crown and that he had best flee to Holland.

General von Schleicher was for years the master intrigant and "Field Grey Eminence" of the German Reichswehr. The Hohenzollerns have always looked to him as their smartest stalking horse for a return of the Monarchy. Not long ago Paris heard rumors that Chancellor Hitler would be ousted by a military coup led by General von Schleicher.

These rumors and whatever proofs General Göring may have had last week cost General von Schleicher dear. According to the official Nazi version General von Schleicher resisted arrest by the Secret Police "with a weapon in his hand," Frau von Schleicher flung herself before her husband to protect him and the Secret Police shot them both "in self defense." Later an eyewitness reported that six men in civilian garb had driven into the von Schleicher driveway, summoned the General and his wife, riddled them with bullets in gangster style, sped away without a word.

Bewildered correspondents could get no news of the shooting at the Ministry of Propaganda & Public Enlightenment, which they found strangely vacated by club-footed Minister Paul Josef Goebbels and his propaganda staff. Dominant and domineering General Göring, resplendent in an Air Force uniform of his own design, gave out the first official news.

"All of Prussia is firm in my hands!" he shouted. "Hitler is stronger than ever. Most of the Storm Troopers are loyal. They were merely misled." He then sketched hastily the vague outlines of a plot supposed to have had for its object the kidnapping of Adolf Hitler who was to have been forced to sign a paper turning Germany over for three days to the violence of Storm Troops. In an official printed release General Göring declared:

"The main go-between in the conspiracy was former Reich Chancellor General von Schleicher, who made connection between Captain Roehm and a foreign power* and those eternally dissatisfied figures of yesterday. ... It was self-understood that General von Schleicher had to be arrested. While being arrested, he attempted to make a lightning assault upon those men who were to arrest him. Thereby he lost his life."

Meanwhile Chancellor Hitler had telephoned from Munich to the Nazi Governor of Hanover, an apparently blameless young man with a good war record, Herr Viktor Lutze. "I appoint you to succeed Roehm!" barked the Chancellor into the telephone. "You are the new Storm Troop Chief of Staff!"

Popping into his plane Herr Hitler then flew to Berlin. To the astonishment of correspondents, he alighted arm in arm with Propaganda Minister Dr. Goebbels whom they had supposed to be in hiding since he had been called "the brains of Roehm" and was rumored in Berlin to be the intellectual head of Storm Troop discontent.

Grinning, Dr. Goebbels limped back into his Propaganda Ministry and resumed charge of the German Press which soon printed a list of Hitler "Commandments" to be communicated by Staff Chief Viktor Lutze to Storm Troops.

These revealed orgies costing 30,000 marks per month at Berlin Storm Troop Headquarters, the hiring of expensive limousines with party funds and other extravagances which Adolf Hitler, a teetotaler, vegetarian and non-smoker ordered stopped. "In particular," enjoined gentle Adolf, "I would like every mother to be able to give her sons to the S. A. without fear that they would become

more or less corrupted. I want to see the S. A. leaders men and not laughable monkeys."

Next move was an organized Nazi drive to cheer Germans up and make them forget the blood bath. Every newspaper seller was made to wear a label on his hat reading Gute Laune ("Good Cheer"). Restaurant bands and radio orchestras were commanded to play nothing but lively music and to play it loud.

Since the German people heard only the Hitler side of events last week, their reaction was to decide that the Chancellor had at last proved himself a Strong Man, purged his Party of its worst element and emerged with enhanced prestige. In Paris the indiscreet entourage of tabasco-tongued Foreign Minister Louis Barthou dropped broad hints that further trouble and the fall of Chancellor Hitler are expected and that the foreign policy of France has been based on these expectations for months.

Shocked British editors deplored Adolf Hitler's "gangster methods." Only head of a foreign state to comment was spry little Chancellor of Austria Engelbert Dollfuss, an extremely devout Catholic. "Does it not now become apparent," he observed piously, "that when one leaves the path of Christian thought, the path of Justice, one enters a path of Error from which there is no turning back? . . . Does not the light at last dawn upon us that one can not make a people happy with violence?"

The light for which Germans waited most anxiously was some dawning indication from President von Hindenburg of his attitude toward last week's massacre. Troubled more than usual by his prostate, the 86-year-old Reichspräsident was at his country estate at Neudeck in East Prussia attended by physicians so numerous that they were called a "major medical council." There were rumors that Old Paul was dead, promptly denied by his State Secretary Dr. Otto Meissner. Forty-eight hours after the shooting began the Hitler Government released two telegrams calculated to set all doubts at rest.

The first was to Chancellor Hitler:

I GATHER FROM REPORTS SUBMITTED TO ME THAT BY ENERGETIC INTERVENTION YOU COURAGEOUSLY, AT THE RISK OF YOUR LIFE, SUPPRESSED ALL TREASONABLE MACHINATIONS AT THE OUTSET. YOU SAVED THE GERMAN PEOPLE FROM GRAVE DANGER. I THEREFORE CONVEY TO YOU EXPRESSIONS OF SINCERE, HEARTFELT THANKS AND APPRECIATION.

HINDENBURG

Strutting General Göring said he had received the following:

I CONVEY TO YOU AN EXPRESSION OF THANKS AND APPRECIATION FOR YOUR ENERGETIC, SUCCESSFUL ACTION IN QUELLING TREASONABLE ATTEMPTS. WITH COMRADELY GREETINGS.

HINDENBURG

*Since every German assumed this meant France, the Cabinet of Premier Gaston Doumergue issued an official communiqué at Paris: "Neither directly nor indirectly were the instigators of the plot in contact with the French Government."

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