

Hitler's Headsman

By Ernest von Hartz

FOR six days a week Heinrich Himmler as head of the Third Reich's Secret Police, the Gestapo, can liquidate Germans and on the seventh day retire to his chicken farm convinced that if heads must roll they roll for the good of the Reich and to the glory of God.

The Freudians have a name for him but to literal-minded Germans he is simply a cunning, crafty police commandant who has a disagreeable habit of striking at night and who is almost a magician in his ability to make people disappear. However, there is nothing supernatural about Heinrich Himmler. He is simply a product of power politics as practiced in dictatorships.

But do not get the impression that Himmler is simply a past master in the art of the headsman's ax and the guillotine. Those in the Nazi councils will tell you that he is the most likely heir apparent to the Fuehrer. For besides being head of the Gestapo he is supreme commander of all German police as well as commander of the Elite Guards. This corps of black-shirt stalwarts liquidated the Storm Troop opposition, headed by Captain Ernst Roehm, on the fateful night of June 30, 1934, with the neatness and dispatch of Capone henchmen, and murdered former Chancellor Kurt von Schleicher and his aristocratic wife as they were enjoying their coffee and rolls in their home the next morning.

And yet you hear little about Himmler outside Germany. The more publicized Field Marshal Hermann Goering, Nazidom's current Number Two man, with his 110 uniforms and multitudinous titles, and Paul Joseph Goebbels, the stage manager of the Nazi propaganda spectacles and the official voice of German culture, crowd the headlines. But it is the wily, slight, anemic-looking Himmler, whose cold eyes peer at you from steel-rimmed glasses, who wields the iron fist behind the scenes. In his climb to the top he has had to march frequently over the bodies of fallen comrades, but that is part of the game as played by the Nazis.

He has dossiers on every man of substance in Germany. Party functionary, business leader, churchman, diplomat, army officer or statesman—all are nicely indexed for the day when their case histories might be needed in a hurry. Because in Germany everyone is suspect. Some Nazis will even tell you that Himmler has a dossier on himself.

Organized for Extermination

Wherever German interests exist, there Himmler has his agents, awaiting der Tag. The conquest of Austria and the subsequent "purge" offer a classic example of the Nazi police mentality at work. In the first place, German secret agents had been compiling data in Austria for four years. Ever since the failure of the Nazis to overthrow the government in the putsch of July, 1934, the police had redoubled their efforts,

Himmler

building up dossiers on officials, spying on Socialist and Communist workers by gaining their confidence, gathering incriminating data on the clergy and all others suspected of opposing the Nazi concept of happiness.

Thus when Himmler and his 16,000 police went into Austria for the "mopping up," every enemy of the new regime had been spotted. The police knew just where to strike. Jails and concentration camps were filled overnight.

In brief, Himmler is an organizing genius. For more than ten years he has held administrative positions and during that time he has become one of the most able administrators in Germany. His agile mind and his efficient police give him a tremendous advantage over the blustering Goering and the vitriolic Goebbels, the latter probably the most unpopular man in Hitler's Reich.

Himmler is so convinced that Hitler is a superman that for him he has given up his church (he used to be a Catholic), and he has killed some of his closest comrades (the aforementioned Roehm as well as Gregor Strasser, one of the leaders of the party left wing who was executed in the blood purge).

There were no indications in Himmler's youth that he would develop into a powerful figure in a revolutionary Germany. He was born in Munich on October 7, 1900, to middle-class parents who had military aspirations for their son. He entered the army as soon as he was old enough—in 1917—with the idea that after the war he would follow a military career as an officer. But postwar Germany's greatly reduced army found no place in its ranks for the young and not too robust Himmler, so he became, instead, a member of the army of the dissatisfied and the disillusioned.

He was ripe for National Socialism. Hitler, in the Munich of 1920, was the embodiment of the dissatisfaction felt by every young German who could not discipline himself to the new order. The Third Reich of today is built of the desperation of these postwar youths.

Himmler played an important part in the beer-hall putsch of 1923, and when the Fuehrer was sentenced to Landsberg Fortress after his trial for treason (they get shot now for far less in Hitler's Reich) Himmler was left to his own devices. He had studied agriculture at the Munich Technical High School. He now worked in a fertilizer factory and from that he turned to various other pursuits, among which was chicken farming.

After Hitler's release the short-lived German prosperity almost spelled death for the Nazis, a party that depended for its very existence on empty stomachs and dissatisfaction. But the first phase of the economic crisis paved the way for the resurgence of National Socialism, and Himmler once again found his mission in the party ranks. He became the business manager of the party in lower Bavaria and for the first time his real talents came to the fore. He did a masterly job of organization and the Nazi party in Bavaria soon constituted the best gang of hell-raisers in Germany. Himmler's lads wrecked halls, hurled stench bombs, beat up opponents and acted generally in what has become the best Nazi tradition.

To Reward a True Nazi

Such work could not go unheeded and by 1927 Himmler was second in command of the crack Elite Guards, the

Himmler

crème de la crème of the Nazi movement. It took him only two years to get the complete organization under his belt, despite Goering's opposition, and by 1930 he was a respected member of the Reichstag and a professional party administrator.

Where Himmler succeeded and where Roehm fell was in the fact that the former realized that the party would have to play ball with the rich industrialists, arms manufacturers and bankers who had financed it as a potent force with which to combat trade unions. The planks in the party platform calling for Socialist reforms, Himmler knew, were doomed by the very military-economic nature of Fascism. The result was that Himmler threw his weight with the rightist faction and the secret police dossiers were built up with the idea that a showdown was inevitable.

Where Roehm failed to Nazify the army in 1934, Himmler succeeded in Nazifying the police and co-ordinating it with the Elite Guards, once again over Goering's opposition. It was in June, 1936, that Himmler was made supreme police commander of the Third Reich, accountable only to Hitler. And the final *coup de grâce* came last February when Field Marshal von Blomberg (on the pretense that he had married a carpenter's daughter but actually, in a final show of strength between army and party) walked the plank to retirement, and the army, for the first time in modern Germany's history, assumed a decided political character, demonstrative of Hitler's gain in prestige and power.

Thus today Hitler is the field lord of the army, and his man Himmler is the supreme commander of the police and Elite Guards. Between them they command more than 2,500,000 well-armed, efficiently trained men, the pick of the nation. Between them they hold Germany aloft on their truncheons, bayonets and guns. And with the conquest of Austria their field has widened and new horizons are opened to them.

So long as Hitler lives, Himmler will be his trusted lieutenant, his man Friday. But once let the struggle for power start in a temporarily leaderless nation, and the wise money will go on Himmler. He is a natural in a nation that respects and appreciates the strong arm of the law—even if it is the law of the jungle.



Heinrich Himmler yields to no one in his blind loyalty to Der Fuehrer