

WHY HITLER THINKS HE'LL WIN



A famous American correspondent who talked with the Big Noise of Berchtesgaden, and watched the Nazi war machine at close range, brings back a grim message from Berlin... Hitler, more confident than ever, expects to finish off Russia and block any Allies invasion with his "impregnable" West Wall. Here are cold facts from inside Germany that should smash our last trace of complacency



WHEN I left Germany just a few months ago, it was clear that Adolf Hitler still believed he was going to win the war. There is no reason to think that he has changed his opinion since then.

As the group with which I had been interned for five months crossed the Spanish frontier to freedom, the armed Secret Police who had guarded us day and night gave us a grim, unsmiling salute of farewell—stiff, arrogant, assured. They were much like Hitler himself.

I have talked with Hitler five or six times, and have seen him in action at close range perhaps a hundred more. Never once did he display anything but supreme confidence in himself and his aims. He has made an unyielding habit of *believing* in success, and from this belief he draws strength and determination.

My first meeting with him was in 1931, and it proved to be typical of all that followed: It was like a nice, cozy chat with a phonograph. A small press conference for American and English correspondents had been arranged at the Kaiserhof Hotel in Berlin. About ten of us sat on straight-backed chairs as if at a lecture, which is pretty much what it turned out to be.

When Hitler, dressed in simple brown uniform, entered the room, I immediately got an impression of great dynamism, and complete humorlessness. He spoke a few words of greeting, formal and without real cordiality, and then launched into a harangue about the Nazis' objectives. He talked for 40 minutes—about Jews, Bolshevists, "interest slavery," and the "Dictate" of Versailles. When he finished, he shook hands with each of us, gave a stiff little bow, and left the room. He had not smiled once. Neither had we.

The last time I saw Hitler (it was 1941, exactly ten years after that first meeting) was at one of those much-pageantied Nazi ceremonies called "*Staatsakte*," or Acts of State. This one was staged, complete with gold braid and klieg lights, to allow the representatives of several small European satellites to express their solidarity with Germany.

In the Ambassadors Hall of the great new Reichschancellery, Hitler took his place in the center at a long, polished table, the visiting delegates to right and left of him. He looked bored through all the pitiful little speeches of loyalty. At last, he arose slowly, looked imperiously to right and to left, and began to talk. Gone was his boredom, gone his impatience. In a strong voice, complete master of the moment, he delivered a minor oration on what Germany and these allies were fighting for, on why they must and would win.

He had said the same thing a hundred times before, and he said it now as confidently as if they were words of eternal right. Occasionally, as I had seen him do at interviews, he jabbed the air savagely with his right index finger, his lower jaw and lip thrust out, as if trying to force his words home with physical violence. On some phrases his voice rose to the familiar strident pitch. When it was all over, everybody realized that only one man of the lot had put on a show, and that was Adolf Hitler.

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"Hitler believes that his soldiers are the best in the world, best-trained, best-equipped, with the highest morale"

Positive and confident himself, Hitler wants no one around him who does not think and act that way, too. That explains the rise of men like Joachim von Ribbentrop, the wines and liquors dealer who became Nazi Foreign Minister in 1938. Uncompromising and unscrupulous, he realized what kind of foil Hitler wanted, and sometimes even outbid *der Fuehrer* in audacity. History will prove his advice to have been false, but Hitler likes him "because he is cold and decisive; nothing shakes him."

This team's snowball of political triumphs commenced rolling up weight with the union of Austria and the Reich early in 1938, after starting at home with the reintroduction of military conscription and the reoccupation of the Rhineland. Speedily after Austria came the Sudeten settlement, the occupation of Prague, the recovery of Memel.

Each of these moves accomplished a double purpose; it heartened the German people at home and produced consternation, fear, and weakness abroad. Even when he launched the war, the momentum—what Hitler calls his principle of "dynamic progression"—was maintained: Poland, Norway, Holland, Belgium, (Continued on page 116) France, Yugoslavia, Greece, Crete, North Africa, Russia! And today, despite the fact that the war in Russia has been vastly tougher than he expected, Hitler trusts his snowball of success to go on rolling along.

Hitler's almost naïve confidence that things he plans are going to come true (and most of them have) is illustrated by an article which he contributed to a German architectural magazine about the huge Reichschancellory which he ordered built in January, 1938. "In the last days of December," he wrote, "I decided to solve the Austrian question and to found the Great German Reich. I felt, therefore, that this Reich, from the standpoint of administrative needs and prestige, required a fitting Chancellory."

"I decided!" As if the lives of millions of people were not involved, as if Austria's Jews and anti-Nazis would not perish by thousands, as if ruined men would not be sent scurrying across the frontiers in hordes by the blow of this smashing fist! "I decided"—as if to take a streetcar ride! And yet it may not be so strange, after all, for Hitler is convinced that he was sent by Providence to lead the German "Master Race" to domination of Europe at least, and he doesn't believe that Providence is going to let him down.

THERE is nothing formally religious about this faith. Hitler is a renegade from the Catholic Church, to which he belonged, but he expresses it in conventional terms when he says that "God will surely not let such brave soldiers—the German ones—die in vain." In

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short, "*Gott mit uns*" in achieving the Third Reich's aims. And just to be sure to cover all angles, Hitler has had his astrologers assure him that this war is going to turn out right for him! He spent three hours closeted with them just before the Sudetenland campaign, and the Munich Pact proved them right.

Hitler's first words after learning of the bomb attempt upon his life at Munich in 1938 (he had left the scene of the explosion himself a few minutes earlier) were, "A man must have luck!" He believes in this luck, but he calculates his chances with mathematical precision before he strikes out at an enemy.

His successes in the Polish and French campaigns were the result of the most careful planning, of exhaustive staff work, and of preparation long in advance of action. During the winter of the 1939-40 "*Sitzkrieg*," the Nazis were preparing their spring attack. In Poland, they built exact replicas of English cottages complete to the last detail of chimneys, gutters, and slant of roofs, on which imaginary paratroop invaders could practice. They put up concrete and steel "bunkers" of precisely the type they were going to have to storm in Belgium and France.

On a trip to the West Wall, Hitler's Rhineland line of fortifications, before the spring invasion, I saw these exercises going on every day. Peasants calmly plowed their fields, while infantrymen "attacked" pseudo-pillboxes with dynamite and liquid fire a stone's-throw away. The same tests were going on at other proving grounds in all parts of the Reich. Hitler himself frequently visited the grounds at Doeberitz near Berlin.

Hitler has always maintained direct contact with all phases of operations, constantly visiting airfields and barracks to talk with the men. In Berlin, I have frequently seen his automobile in front of the War Ministry—or General Keitel's or General Brauchitsch's automobile at the Chancellory—until late at night. For Hitler believes in personally knowing his generals, and even many of the lesser officers.

After he personally assumed supreme command of the armed forces in 1938, he assumed the full right of autocratic decision. As the subsequent campaigns revealed the merits or deficiencies of his leaders, he proceeded to weed out ruthlessly those men who could not stand the strain physically or attain their objectives on schedule, and to promote those who could. Men like the "Nazi General" Rommel, who was no graduate of the War Academy but who showed he could fight desert warfare better than any other, was given all the authority and support he wanted.

I have seen some of these German generals in the field, in Belgium and France and in Russia. They live, eat, drink, and sleep war. Tough and alert, they get up into the front lines and sometimes get killed there. Of the fifteen or twenty I have met, I remember particularly clearly General von Briesen. He was not one of the great names, but he was typical. In Poland a shot had shattered the bone of his right arm.

When I met him he was reviewing his division as it swept through Paris, actually in pursuit of the French south of the capital. Having spent an earlier happier year in Paris, I was feeling pretty sick at the conquest. I stood near Von Briesen, a gnarled, tough man whose face betrayed no trace of gentleness. His arm had not yet healed, and every time he raised it in salute a grimace of pain twisted his features. But in his hard face there was pride, and it was in his voice when he said "*Die sind Kerls! Kernholz jedes Stueck!*" ("Those are real men! Heart of oak, every one of them!") Later, in Russia, they met men just as hard, and there von Briesen lost his life.

In his confidence in victory, Hitler counts not only upon his generals, but upon his soldiers, too. He believes that they are the best soldiers in the world; the best-trained, best-equipped, with battle experience that none others can match, and with the highest morale.

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I have seen thousands of these men in action, moving into and out of battle, on long marches in East and West; I have seen them coming wounded into dressing stations, on leave, resting by roadsides grimy and tired. There is nothing superhuman about them. Like soldiers everywhere, they are usually hungry, often homesick, and they grumble and curse and boast.

THEY boast that they have chased the British into the sea wherever they have met them, and they curse the Russians as men who fight with "bestial ferocity" out of all proportion to the strategic objectives involved. To them, only the German cause is just. They are good soldiers for Hitler's purposes, very definitely good. They are unsentimental about war, hardened and healthy, utterly disciplined, and unfailingly aggressive.

But Russia has been bitterly hard going for them. On the faces of thousands of them there, I could not observe a single grin or smile. On the Russian front, distances are interminable, there are few villages to provide shelter, and death is always closer.

I have eaten in numerous field kitchens and found the food merely sustaining, nothing more. Breakfast consists of malt coffee, black bread, and sometimes oatmeal porridge; lunch is a thick soup, usually bean, with a small piece of meat; supper is black bread and malt coffee again, with butter and cheese or sausage. But the soldiers know that they receive whatever "of the best" is available.

In his supreme confidence, Hitler counts too upon his "home front." However much the rest of the world derides his theory of the "Master Race," Hitler regards the Germans as the best and most efficient people ever created. He relies upon the German worker, the housewife, the farmer, to help him win the war. I recall his saying in a talk I had with him in 1934, "I need no protection from the people. I depend on them, and they depend on me. If I should announce that I was going to *Unter den Linden* at 3:45 this afternoon, the streets would be black with enthusiastic crowds cheering me all the way!"

But whatever the inspiration of public support today, whether it is fear of defeat, or idealism, or just plain discipline plus Gestapo, there are no present signs of revolution or imminent collapse in Germany, and Hitler knows it. Food is bad and growing steadily worse. The fuel and clothing situations are definitely bad. Even surreptitious conversations that I had during internment showed that the population has no stomach for this war whatever. But none of this means that the cracks in morale are yet critical.

If anybody starves in Nazi-controlled Europe, it won't be the Germans; nor will the fighting forces lack ammunition as long as there is a mine or a factory working in France or Norway or Yugoslavia. If they don't like it, Hitler tells them that Germany is fighting Europe's battle, against Bolshevism in the East and against "Jewish-Democratic Plutocracy" in the West. If they more openly rebel, he has his firing squads. One way or another, he proposes to get "co-operation."

AS FAR as the military picture is concerned, Hitler sees no reason for immediate concern. Unquestionably, he expects to have to go through another winter in Russia, but he sees himself within real reach of breaking Soviet power, perhaps in conjunction with a Japanese attack upon Siberia.

As for the West (Britain and the United States), Hitler realizes, but does not quail before, his danger there. He saw that an aerial *blitz* alone did not subdue the British Isles, and he sees no present reason to believe that one can conquer Germany. Before even that can come, he and many of his generals consider it practicable to invade the British Isles by a sea and air-borne attack. He counts upon the German submarines operating off our coasts, and upon Japanese pressure on our Pacific

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flank, to reduce vitally the aid which we are able to give Britain, either to enable the British to stand off invasion, or to co-operate in an invasion of the continent.

Hitler believes that his formidable defenses along the entire North Sea and Atlantic coasts from Narvik to Biarritz are far enough along to repulse any invasion attempt. Such raids as that at Dieppe are interpreted loudly by German propaganda as repulses.

Time and again in Berlin before the arrest and internment of correspondents, I was asked in that peculiar style of academic taunting which the Nazis affect, "But just *how* are you going to get at us in the West?" It was difficult to answer. I knew that even if a large force should get through France Hitler relies upon his murderous West Wall to keep invaders out.

I made a five-day tour of this line of fortifications, one of the first foreign visitors to see it manned during wartime. Because Hitler wanted our reports to inform the world how strong the line was, we had *carte blanche* to see what we wanted. We inspected weapons that even general staff officers had not seen.

It is indeed a formidable line. One hundred and fifty to two hundred miles long, and at some points fifty miles deep, it is made up of a double, triple, or even quadruple row of powerful steel and concrete forts, like rows of shark's teeth, scientifically placed so as to keep the foe at all times in a raking flank fire. Some units are deep in forests, others sunk into the hillsides. Still others on the fringes of villages are disguised as bungalows and filling stations. Tank traps front and interlace the entire system, which, as far as telephonic communication is concerned, presents a unit. But, unlike the Maginot Line, whose faults Hitler avoided in building his own line, it does not present any sort of "solid front" to enemy artillery. It must be reduced unit by unit (and there are perhaps ten thousand of them), probably from the air. Each unit is self-contained, with its own living quarters, air supply, sick-bay, etc., so that none is vitally affected when any other is put out of business.

Hitler has called this line "invincible." As the Finnish general who was one of our party observed, "No line is invincible if you're willing to pay the price." But Hitler figures now also on the French, Belgian, and Dutch defenses, which in 1942 and 1943 will be pointing the way he wants them to point.

With his air fleets released from the Eastern front, Hitler expects to be able to meet the heavy air attacks which he knows are scheduled for the Reich. German aviation experts still regard the effectiveness of our Flying Fortresses and other heavy bombers as exaggerated, and, of course, they have been working for a number of years on specific types of fighters to meet them.

Of course, it is always conceivable that Hitler will decide to send groups of raiders against our cities. One group in the Air Ministry has favored this for some time; another says that such raids would do more harm, by further unifying public opinion here, than the moral or physical damage would be worth.

In his over-all estimate of his danger from the United States, Hitler is doubtless relying on reports which I happen to know he received something over a year ago. They indicated that it would be eighteen months or two years from then before our production got into full swing. Obviously, he knows that our schedules have been greatly stepped up since then, but it is a safe bet that he still figures that it will be late next spring or even summer before we can prepare enough men and equipment to attempt invasion.

Meanwhile, he hopes to get clear in Russia, shift all but a strong occupying force to the West to bolster up the 20 to 25 German divisions in France, and to pad out his weak Norwegian forces. He counts upon the Japanese to keep us engaged and help him in Russia.

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I HAVE presented the essential psychological and material factors in Hitler's conviction that he will still win the war. There were signs even while I was still in Germany that the German people have given up the dream of a "total victory" to follow their total war. Hitler used to promise them certain victory within a stipulated time, but the farthest he goes now is "ultimate victory at any cost."

If the war had been concluded by this summer, the cost in German lives and in air-raid damage and privation at home would already have been terribly high. But the German people know now that they are fighting for their lives, and the Nazi hierarchy knows that it is fighting for the very existence of what it has struggled for for over twenty years.

There will be no more Hitler, no more Third Reich, no more New Order in Europe if what we expect to happen does happen. But it won't happen by itself.

Whether Hitler's belief that he is going to win is simply bravado or some kind of mystic confidence, or whether the German people are simply going on because they are desperately afraid to lose, they are all fighting with everything they've got. And the sooner we take that into consideration, the better it will be.

When I got back, I found that a great many people couldn't understand why Hitler didn't realize he was whipped and, by admitting it, save perhaps millions of lives.

Well, he doesn't realize it—not yet, and not by a long shot! And we can't both win.

by Frederick Oechsner

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