

PREFACE

In January 1933, Adolf Hitler, head of the rapidly growing and often violent National Socialist or Nazi Party, was named Chancellor of Germany. Hitler's political enemies engineered his appointment, arguing that once he was in government they could control him.

They were wrong.

Within three months Hitler forced a new election that swept his party into power, and almost immediately it passed legislation allowing him to govern without Parliament. Hitler, a failed artist, was now the absolute ruler of Germany. An enormously effective orator, Hitler used every opportunity to proclaim the superiority of the German "Aryan race." He also promised to restore Germany, humiliated and severely sanctioned after starting and losing the First World War, to a position of greatness.

Instead he destroyed it.

By 1939, the Nazi Party had imposed dictatorial control over every aspect of German society: schools, press, churches, courts and the arts. Even family life was regulated, with the Party deciding who could marry and the number of children they were expected to have. Paranoia was rampant. Neighbor spied on neighbor, reporting questionable individuals to the Gestapo, the dreaded secret police—a sure death sentence. Under the direction of Heinrich Himmler—a former fertilizer salesman who became Hitler's right-hand man—the Nazis worked relentlessly to rid Germany, and ultimately Europe, of entire groups, foremost the Jews, through mass murder.

Some 12 million men, women and children were systematically and horribly murdered in German concentration camps. Of these, more than 6 million were Jews, the rest "enemies of the state," gypsies and other "undesirables" and those deemed mentally or physically unfit and, therefore, of no value to society. While a few Germans of conscience stepped forward and risked their own lives to shelter or help Hitler's targeted victims escape

to other countries, most either condoned the atrocities or were too intimidated to get involved.

By the end of 1941, the German military, viewed by many as unstoppable, had seized Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg and France and had attacked Russia. It was all part of Hitler's 1933 master plan, to create a new and glorious German Reich that would last a thousand years.

It lasted twelve.

During those twelve years of iron-fisted repression, Hitler plunged the world into a lingering war of devastation unrivaled in the history of humankind. More than 60 million lives were lost. Not that Hitler was totally unopposed. Some Germans joined various secret resistance movements. Their motives often differed, but their aim was the same: replace the Nazi government. Early on these groups sought to avoid war. After 1941 they sought to end it. At first they thought that they could act without violence. Later they realized violence was the only course of action.

They had to kill Hitler.

The resisters included soldiers, students, conservatives, communists, intellectuals, socialites, celebrities, everyday citizens, high-ranking Nazi Party members, clergy and even Jews still in Germany leading underground lives.

Often the resisters maintained loose alliances with like groups in countries under German rule. Occasionally they were aided by forces beyond Germany, notably the United States and Great Britain, both of which formulated their own plans to remove Hitler and topple his government. So, too, did their military ally Joseph Stalin, the Russian ruler who matched—or surpassed—Hitler in tyranny and in the taking of innocent lives. After the war the German resisters were widely regarded by their fellow Germans as traitors.

Today they are honored as heroes.

Some may see what follows as a chronicle of failure. After all, there was no assassination nor was there a governmental overthrow. Hitler remained *der Führer*—the Supreme Leader—of Germany until April 30, 1945, when, in a bunker beneath Berlin, he shot himself in the head. A week later, on May 7, the war in Europe, which he had started, was over.