

## CHAPTER 1

Berlin, Germany | July 1934

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Since arriving in Berlin, Germany a year ago, the constant social upheaval no longer shocked U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel Spencer Fleming. The reputation of Berlin as the center of European decadence in the 1920s now transformed into a depressive environment in the last couple of years. Having weathered the food deprivations during the Great War and economic collapse following Germany's defeat, the years of recovery and hopes for a democratic government collapsed under the weight of the worldwide Great Depression. Exacerbated by political tensions, violent confrontations plagued Germany.

The principle instigators of political violence were the paramilitary ranks of the National Socialist German's Workers Party. In German, Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei, abbreviated NSDAP. The English acronym, the Nazi Party. The *Sturmabteilung*, the SA, literally storm detachment, represented the paramilitary wing of the party. Comprised largely of former veterans of the Great War who organized first in regional bands called *Freikorps*, the SA provided a political outlet for those disillusioned by the 1918 armistice of the Great War. Instead of recognizing the failure of a militaristic monarchy bent on imperialistic expansion as the fault, these former soldiers attributed blame to the political left, mainly the communists and the Jews. They argued the German army was not defeated in the field.

With access to stocks of brown WWI uniforms, the SA became known as Brownshirts. Patterned after Mussolini's Fascist Blackshirts in Italy, the SA proved an integral component of Adolf Hitler's rise to power, organizing street demonstrations

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and directing violence against Jews and political opponents. The only political party with an organized paramilitary wing.

For a decade, the growing ranks of the SA served Adolf Hitler's political ambitions. By 1933, their ranks swelled to over 2,000,000. This compared to the strength of the regular army, the Reichswehr, of only 100,000 as limited by the 1919 Treaty of Versailles.

With the Nazi Party achieving 44% of the votes in the March 1933 election, President Paul Hindenburg had no alternative but to make Hitler chancellor in order to establish a functioning government. The SA could now exert its influence without restraint. SA storm troopers attacked Jewish-owned retail stores. Later, to enforce a boycott of Jewish businesses, storm troopers prevented entry. A week after the boycott, the Nazi controlled government passed a law excluding Jews from civil service or teaching at public schools of universities. SA thugs randomly dragged Jews into the street humiliating and often beating them. Targeted killings of Jews became commonplace.

By 1934, formations of uniformed SA marched in all major cities. Failure for anyone not to render the outstretched arm and *sieg heil* salute risked physical assault. Adding to the militaristic environment, the black-uniformed Schutzstaffel, the SS, originally organized from within the SA as Hitler's elite personal bodyguard, became increasingly obvious.

With this climate of constant political turmoil and violence, Colonel Fleming received a telephone call at his office in the United States Embassy located at Bendlerstrasse 39, just south of the Brandenburg Gate. Although a Saturday, Fleming was catching up on paperwork from a hectic week. The date, June 30, 1934, a day he would not soon forget. Who would be calling at seven-thirty in the morning?

"Spencer, this is Konrad. I tried your apartment first. Irma called off the dinner party scheduled for tonight."

What the hell has happened? There was no dinner party scheduled for tonight. This was merely a coded reference that Richter had something of importance for Fleming. Richter was Fleming's secret intelligence source within German military intelligence, the Abwehr.

"That is unfortunate. I was so looking forward to a relaxing

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social evening.”

“So was Irma. A matter of some delicacy. Best explained personally over coffee. Can you meet me in thirty minutes at the coffee house?”

“Certainly. Tired of dealing with paperwork on my Saturday off anyway.”

Richter was not acting on his own initiative. He was the conduit to his boss, Lieutenant Colonel Hans Oster. Fleming knew this from his only personal meeting with Oster months earlier. Feeding secret information to Fleming perhaps authorized from higher within the Abwehr.

Although skillfully indirect, Oster told Fleming it was important to establish confidential conduits with foreign intelligence agencies to bypass official diplomatic channels. Since the United States had no foreign intelligence service, would Fleming act in that capacity? Oster suggested dissatisfaction within the military toward certain Nazi political objectives. A subtle implication he spoke for some wider faction with the German military. Fleming remained wary. Oster might be playing a double game.

However, since that first meeting, Fleming was often able to verify independently the sensitive information passed along by Major Richter. The information was enlightening, casting the Nazis criminal enterprise growing in scope as a threat to Germany itself. Oster was clearly not purveying Nazi disinformation.

Over their months of contact, Richter candidly admitted his personal hatred for the Nazis. He supported Colonel Oster’s efforts to provide the United States with information of the looming danger of this megalomaniac Adolf Hitler. Only the United States might deter Hitler from eventually taking Germany to war again. The British-French alliance of the Great War was a paper tiger.

Fleming assumed Oster represented some faction of the German military that sought to undermine the Nazi regime. Perhaps for the purpose of engineering a coup d’état. The Abwehr as the military intelligence service essential to any such subversion. They also may have ulterior reasons for providing confidential information to the United States.

Fleming arrived at their favorite coffeehouse not far from the

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embassy or military high command headquarters to find Richter waiting at a table in the back. There were few other patrons.

Richter stood to shake hands. Before Fleming could sit down he said, "Hours ago Hitler moved violently against the SA. Outside Munich."

Fleming was well aware of the growing tensions between the chief of staff of the SA, Ernst Röhm and Hitler. Although a close Hitler follower from the earliest days of the Beer Hall Putsch in Munich in 1923, Röhm's views now ran counter to Hitler's ambitions. In simplest form, Röhm aspired to a Germany controlled by rightwing socialism.

Hitler's political ideology differed significantly. He was even against including the word socialist in the name of the National Socialist German Workers' Party. His vision was an autocratic Third Reich as a Germanic militaristic empire ruling Europe. Hitler was now close to achieving his goal of unchallenged rule of Germany. Only eighty-six year old President Paul von Hindenburg stood in his way. Hitler actively curried favor with the conservative regular army and German industrialists necessary to his grandiose plans. Both these factions feared Röhm and his SA pseudo army of disaffected former soldiers. Other senior Nazis like Hermann Göring, Henrich Himmler, and Joseph Goebbels despised Röhm.

"What do you mean?"

"Hitler lured all the SA leadership to a meeting at the Hanselbauer Pension in Bad Wiessee a spa town in Upper Bavaria. Ostensibly to resolve growing differences with the SA. Our sources say Hitler personally led a large detachment of SS and arrested everyone, including Röhm. Looks like a purge."

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The meeting was to take place at 11:00am on Saturday June 30, 1934. In preparation, Minister of Defense Werner von Blomberg, supporting the plot against the SA, issued a general alert. SS Headquarters ordered all units to muster at their barracks armed. After midnight, 220 SS of the Leibstandarte, Hitler's personal SS bodyguard regiment under the command of Sepp Dietrich, boarded a train south to the small railway station

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in Kaufering outside Munich in Bavaria.

The plan was simple. The SS was to arrest the entire SA leadership arriving in Munich then transport them to Munich's Stadelheim Prison. The Bavarian police would operate under SS orders.

Hitler arrived at Oberwiesenfeld, Munich at 4:00am in his three-engine Junkers Ju52 aircraft. Driven to the Bavarian Ministry of the Interior, Hitler issued orders to Munich Gauleiter Wagner to dispatch SS squads and Bavarian police to arrest all SA senior officers. Arriving at 4:30 in the morning in a foul mood now convinced of Röhm's treachery, Hitler was so enraged he personally ripped the epaulets off the shirt of the chief of the Munich police for failing to keep order during an SA rampage of violence the previous night. Hitler shouted that he would have the chief shot.

With two escort cars of SS and Bavarian police commanded by SS-Obersturmbannführer Michael Lippert, Hitler departed for Bad Wiessee.

Arriving at the Hanselbauer Pension at 6:30, Hitler and his armed men pushed passed a startled elderly woman at the front door. Taking up positions outside the rooms of the senior SA, Lippert led Hitler to Röhm's room.

Lippert knocked, "Chief of Staff Röhm, I have an urgent message to deliver."

Moments later the door opened and Lippert pushed it open violently forcing Röhm back into the room. Adolf Hitler stood there holding a revolver. Bewildered, the overweight Röhm looked silly in his underwear and bare feet.

Hitler yelled, "Röhm, you are a traitor! Get dressed. You are under arrest."

With that, Hitler turned and left the hotel leaving the arrests to his henchmen. To his surprise after stepping outside, a lorry pulled up discharging a fully armed detachment of Röhm's headquarter guard arriving from Munich.

Hitler defused the potentially tense situation by turning on the charm. They did not know their commander SA Standartenführer Uhl now sat under guard in the hotel basement awaiting arrival of additional SS forces for transport to Stadelheim Prison.

Addressing the SA men, "Chief of Staff Röhm orders you to

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return to barracks in Munich. As your Führer, I am here to meet with the entire leadership of the Sturmabteilung. It was I who founded the Sturmabteilung in 1920 as the backbone of the Party. That has not changed. I am here to dispel rumors instigated by our enemies suggesting discord with the Schutzstaffel. The SA remains essential for achieving the objectives of German nationalism. All is secure here. Now return to Munich."

Delivered with a broad smile, Hitler raised his arm in the Nazi salute. The SA troops snapped to attention and returned the salute with a vigorous *sieg heil*.

Hitler too was returning to Munich leaving the detained SA to the fate of the SS. As a precaution, he returned to Munich by an indirect route to avoid encountering Röhm's personal guard.

Hitler arrived at Munich Party Headquarters at 10:00am, cordoned off by prior arrangement by regular army soldiers. Defense Minister Colonel-General Werner von Blomberg and Major-General Walter von Reichenau were part of the plot. Hitler telephoned Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels giving him the go-ahead to issue the agreed on code word *Kolibri* to Göring and Himmler. Regional commanders of the Sicherheitsdienst des Reichsführer-SS, the SD intelligence branch of the SS, opened sealed orders. Those orders called for summary execution of the listed names. Hitler wanted no show trials or protracted discussions over the contrived reason for this coup d'état. He intended to cut the head off the snake in one blow. Himmler's chief subordinate Reinhard Heydrich let loose the SD death squads. While most of the victims were SA, it was an opportunity to rid others by simply labeling them as plotters.

The public justification cited the Führer acted as necessary to protect Germany from a plot by Ernst Röhm and General Kurt von Schleicher. Described as Röhm and Schleicher, the former defense minister, conspiring to use the vast numbers of the SA to overpower the much smaller Reichswehr regular army and seize control of the government. Heydrich authored the baseless fiction believed by no one.

As additional SS troops arrived in the early morning hours from Berlin, they arrested SA leaders arriving for the conference at Bad Wiessee at the Munich railway station then transported them to Stadelheim Prison. Those from the Hanselbauer arrived

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to find others already in cells.

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The purge of the SA lasted three days. Ostensibly upheld as thwarting an imminent coup, Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels labeled the threat as the attempted *Röhm Putsch*. Back in Munich, Hitler denounced the conspiracy to an assembled group of select Nazi Party members. Simultaneously, Goebbels telephoned Hermann Göring that same morning to release Heydrich's SS execution squads to liquidate other unsuspecting targets considered a threat to Adolf Hitler.

As for the captured SA leaders now housed in Munich's Stadelheim Prison, none would escape execution. Hitler assigned this task to a favorite officer, SS-Brigadeführer Theodor Eicke, the commandant of nearby Dachau Concentration camp. A committed fanatic, Eicke enforced rigid discipline at the camp by summary execution. As for Ernst Röhm himself, Hitler ordered his old colleague allowed the dignity of committing suicide.

Eicke stood by as Lippert walked into Röhm's cell and laid a pistol with a single bullet on the table.

Lippert said, "The Führer will allow you to die with honor. You have ten minutes."

Röhm replied, "If I am to kill myself, let Adolf do it himself."

Returning after hearing no shot fired within the allotted time, Eicke and Lippert entered the cell to find a defiant Röhm. Without further words, both shot Röhm. Lippert then crossed over to the fallen Röhm to deliver the coup-de-grace shot to the head.

Lippert immediately proceeded to the gristly task of supervising the executions of the remaining eighteen arrested SA leadership. A bullet to the back of the head dispatched thirteen in the exercise yard. However, the remaining five most senior officers suffered the more protracted horror of beheading by guillotine, the method of execution reserved for common criminals. Several of the SS officers vomited at the gruesome spectacle of the heads dropping into buckets.

With no way to keep the purge secret, on July 13, 1934, Hitler justified the action in a nationally broadcast speech to the Reich-

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stag.

*'In this hour I was responsible for the fate of the German people, and thereby I became the supreme judge of the German people. I gave the order to shoot the ringleaders in this treason, and I further gave the order to cauterize down to the raw flesh the ulcers of this poisoning of the wells in our domestic life. Let the nation know that its existence, which depends on its internal order and security, cannot be threatened with impunity by anyone! And let it be known for all time to come that if anyone raises his hand to strike the State, then certain death is his lot.'*

Reportedly, at least 85 people died during the purge. Consensus placed the final death toll as several hundred. The decapitated Sturmabteilung no longer represented a threat. Hitler placated the regular military, the Reichswehr, by removing the SA as a rival military organization. This now allowed Hitler to enlist the complicit Reichswehr and conservative industrial leaders in enthusiastic participation in rearming Germany to serve his territorial ambitions.

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Before even hearing Hitler's public speech, Konrad Richter provided Lieutenant Colonel Spencer Fleming further details. The entire senior leadership of the SA executed. The violent removal of the SA as a threat to Adolf Hitler's ambitions proved a resounding success. A strengthened Hitler now exploited the German power structure as willing collaborators in his dark plans.

Covert Abwehr penetration into the heart of the SS was impressive. Fleming also knew by his own interactions with Reichswehr officers, the Abwehr was predominately anti-Nazi. The Nazi SS security section, the Sicherheitsdienst des Reichsführers-SS headed by Reinhard Heydrich, viewed as a growing rival intelligence agency. Choosing to feed information to the United States with no formal intelligence agency perhaps a safer form of subversion than trusting the duplicitous British MI6 Secret Intelligence Service or the French Deuxième Bureau.

Oster had his reason for selecting a military attaché as a conduit. Perhaps the Abwehr did not understand that peacetime military intelligence held little status in the U.S. Army. Its func-



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tion primarily centered on signals intelligence and code breaking. Political intelligence held no specific interest to the War Department. The military attachés little different from U.S. Department of State consular officers with a designated area of interest.

Fleming could only guess as to their objective for leaking secret information to the Americans. Perhaps nothing more than keeping options open should an opportunity present itself to bring about the downfall of Hitler?

What they did not realize by selecting him as an anti-Nazi conspirator, they got more than just a conduit into the U.S. War Department. The information Richter provided since they met held limited interest to the War Department. As to the details, background, and power struggle behind this dramatic purge of the SA, Fleming would file nothing more to the War Department than material soon becoming public. To do otherwise might suggest the information obtained through espionage, contrary to his official portfolio as military attaché.

Engaging in espionage was exactly what he was up to off the books in parallel with his assigned military duties. An arrangement made in New York before taking up the diplomatic military post in Berlin. The recipients remained unnamed State Department officials, commercial American interests, and American Jewish organizations. Recruited for the effort by someone he met during his consulting assignment to the U.S. delegation to the Paris peace treaty negotiations in 1919. The New York lawyer Allen Dulles now a good friend. As a lawyer, Dulles also served to conceal Fleming's spying activities that appeared far more useful to American interests than his attaché duties.

Following the second meeting with Richter, Fleming placed an overseas call from the U.S. Embassy in Berlin. He assumed the military intelligence service the Abwehr and perhaps the Nazi intelligence agency the Sicherheitsdienst des Reichsführers-SS, the SD, listened to overseas telephone calls. By prior arrangement, he placed his call to the law offices of Sullivan & Cromwell during business hours.

"Extension twenty please."

"Hello, this is Hilda. May I help you?"

"This is Mr. Jones. Are you ready to take this down?"

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"Yes. Go ahead."

"546325 094257 419601 633501 170226 247110 318601  
438101 359801 258701 330938 343516 338701 299701 533723  
360801 265801 489901 576901 674201 227401. End of message.  
Everything clear?"

"Yes, Sir."

Fleming disconnected the call.

For anyone eavesdropping, Mr. Jones could be anyone at the embassy. Fleming transmitted his routine reports to the War Department telegraphically by the embassy communications staff using a designated U.S. Army cipher. Lengthy less urgent reports went into the diplomatic pouch. For Hitler's purge of the SA, he drafted his opinion of the larger implications and sent off the report by telegraph to the War Department. To his New York lawyer colleague, easier to transmit brief information by telephone to Allen Dulles' secretary.

The string of numbers represented Fleming's personally created code. This short message provided only the immediate broad details of the event. Based on chess games and a reference source and method known only to him and Dulles, it used numerical representation instead of letters. This avoided the vulnerability of letter-based representation of transposition and substitution ciphers. Every language presented a frequency of usage for each letter of the alphabet. Therefore, even complex ciphers risked the potential for advanced mathematical analytical decoding methods. His experience during the Great War as an officer in the G-2 intelligence division of the AEF provided a good grounding in ciphers. Fleming's method avoided this with no single number or even two numbers representing a letter thereby removing letter frequency analysis.

This encrypted message translated '*SA leadership purged. Rohm murdered by SS on Hitler's order.*'