

# What was Hitler like in private? German officer, who often met Hitler at the dinnertable, tells

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## FIRST CANADIAN ARMY INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY NUMBER 305

- PART II -

### 1 HITLER

(Third US Army)

#### (1) Preamble

PW, Lt Col, has been with the historical section of the OKW during peacetime. He later kept the war diary at the Fuehrerhauptquartier. Then he was transferred from this HQ because he was considered politically unreliable. Before that, however, he had ample opportunity to see HITLER in action. He became acquainted with him on a more personal basis also, since he has eaten at the same table with him at least about 30 times. PW feels an icy hatred for him and his regime. In his description of the Fuehrer, however, he speaks without bias or emotion.

#### (11) HITLER's Day

HITLER gets up at about eleven or eleven-thirty in the morning. Half an hour later the first reports and briefings are given to him in the operations room of the Fuehrerhauptquartier. At approximately 1400 he eats a frugal meal and then takes his post-prandial nap of about an hour's duration. He again returns to the operations room and continues to receive reports, briefings; various plans are discussed. JODL and KEITEL usually officiate. This continues until 2000 o'clock when a few select - usually some party members and a few trusted staff officers - convene for supper. While this is the main meal, it is as simple as one could imagine. HITLER's repast usually consists of some vegetable stew, followed by stewed fruit as desert. This he tops with one or two glasses beer (the extent of his alcoholic indulgence). HITLER eats rapidly, mechanically. For him food is merely an indispensable means of subsistence. In the course of a few minutes he is finished, but the entire meal usually lasts two hours. He does not smoke, and it is strictly forbidden to smoke in his presence as he seems to be very susceptible to laryngitis. All members of the table engage in general topics of conversation. Quite often HITLER will sit there throughout the entire meal, turned to his own thoughts, seemingly without listening to the talk going on around him. However, he does follow the drift of the conversation vaguely; to him the conversation seems to have the effect that music has on others: it stimulates his thought and relaxes him. Very often though he will suddenly seize upon a topic of conversation that is being discussed. This sudden turn of interest is unpredictable - it is merely that something dropped in the course of the discussion has captivated his imagination. He will then monopolize the conversation for one or two hours at a time, holding forth at length on any one subject. He does not address himself to anyone in particular, his eyes always assume a distant stare, rarely attaching themselves to any person or object in the room. His listeners have the impression as if he were talking to some huge, unseen audience.

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HITLER acts, speaks and thinks like a typical autodidact. The basis of his discourse usually will be something that he has picked up from a book that he has read recently. HITLER's great gift is his adroit simplification of a complex problem, an aptitude that is found so often in self-taught people. He will tackle a problem, and to him it will resolve itself into a perfectly simple thing. His highly trained staff officers might have been wrestling with some problem which to him appears quite simple. Sometimes he hits upon the right solution with uncanny intuition, and sometimes he engages in dangerous oversimplification.

He talked in a mellow baritone, without that raucous, unpleasant stridency of his public speeches. At the table and in his speech he showed many facets of his rather uncouth behavior. He would abstractedly bite his fingernails, he would run his index finger back and forth under his nose, and his table manners were a little short of shocking.

Around 0200 he went out in the open, to walk up and down in front of his bunker. He always took his daily walk at night, completely alone. HITLER was highly susceptible to exposure to the sun which seemed to affect his brain in some way. Generally he was a man that lived at night.

At four in the morning HITLER would retire into his bedroom and go to bed. However, for the next 2 hours he would not sleep. He now started to read. Usually he went through 2 books during these hours. He did not actually read, but skimmed. He had a very clever method of skimming through the books and always managed to get the gist. Fragments of these books always turned up later in his conversations at the table. At 0400 he would go to sleep.

The assembly usually left the table around 2200, and HITLER with his staff officers would receive the latest reports in the operations room. This final conference of the day would last until about 2400 or 0100. He would retire into his private chambers with some trusted high-ranking members of the party, where they would eat various snacks and listen to the phonograph. HITLER himself sipped some health tea during these hours of intimacy and ate prodigious amounts of cake (this cake eating was responsible for a slight digestive disorder and the addition of a "bay window" to his already not too fortunate figure). Quite often he would retire into this privacy with some woman whom he esteemed very much (during later years particularly with a Miss BRAUN whose relationship to HITLER is quite unknown). It is not believed that in these sessions with women HITLER's attitude intensified to any more than a Platonic relationship. (The rumours about his homosexuality and other abnormal obsessions were rumours, and nothing more. If there was any such streak in him, it was a touch of passive masochism in his relationship with women. But there is nothing definite to substantiate even this). HITLER had a beautiful console-model phonograph with a high-class library of classic records. WAGNER, BEETHOVEN were his favourites, in that order. He would produce some of these albums at these sessions with his friends, and listen to the music with passion and rapture, if not artistic understanding.

### (iii) His Personality

PW states that it is difficult to understand HITLER, but not because he is what one would call a complex personality, but rather because some of his characteristics are grotesquely exaggerated. Thus, at times he could be almost inhumanly hard. Some instances illustrate this:

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One evening, shortly after the zenith of ROMMEL's success in Africa a telegram arrived indicating that ROMMEL intended to withdraw. HITLER saw the telegram at that time. Later that night, at four in the morning, another telegram arrived from ROMMEL stating that he was now withdrawing. In view of the previous telegram which HITLER had seen, the duty officer, some Major or Lt Col, decided that it need not be brought to the Fuehrer's immediate attention. The next day HITLER saw the telegram. His wrath was intense, and he ordered that the duty officer report to him immediately. When the officer appeared before him he fumed: "If you say even as much as one word in your own defense, I shall have you shot".

The officer at first did not have the slightest idea what it was all about. It appeared then that he should have brought the second telegram to HITLER's attention as soon as it arrived. The Fuehrer heaped abuse upon him, and minutes later, when he left HITLER's office he was a private of the Army. That same day, with the heavy pack of the common soldier on his back, he made an hour's march to the railway station, bound for service with some outfit on the coast of France.

On the other hand, HITLER seemed to be a man of extremely few but intense emotions and affections. As far as is known he has never had a close friend outside of HESS. HITLER loved him like a brother. Instinctively perhaps HITLER felt that HESS carried the germ of a latent insanity, and it just served to increase the Fuehrer's affection and solicitude for the man. Many times HESS asked him that he be permitted to tour the fronts on inspection. HITLER forbade him straight out to entertain the idea. However, at one time he gave in and HESS was to undertake an inspection of the front. HITLER saw the general staff officer personally who was to conduct HESS on this tour, and he warned him repeatedly not to allow HESS within the range of fire. The officer was threatened with severe punishment should anything ever happen to HESS. And while HESS was gone the Fuehrer was beyond himself for fear that something might happen to him after all. However, when HESS made his flight to Scotland, HITLER bore the loss stoically enough, never giving any outward signs that the loss had hurt him.

Another case in point is Col GSC WEICHSNER, CO of the Organization Section Wehrmacht Fuehrungs Stab, OKH. This was a trusted officer of the Fuehrer. Shortly before the 20 July putsch this officer was approached by members of the plot to give his service in the planned assassination. WEICHSNER declined to participate, giving as his reason the trust which the Fuehrer had placed in him. Somehow during the trial of the other participants of the plot, it was revealed that WEICHSNER had been approached in the plot. The Fuehrer ordered him hung with all the rest because he had not revealed the plot.

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On 20 July PW was just visiting the garrison commander in the vicinity of BERLIN. While PW was talking with him he noticed through the window that the garrison gates swung shut and that the state of alarm was being ordered throughout the camp. PW asked the garrison commander why he had given the order. The commander said that he did not know himself what was going on. At the moment a telegram was brought in, signed by the commander of the Repl Trg Army, Generaloberst FROMM, instructing the garrison to march its troops to the SIEGESSAULE (a monument in BERLIN). The telegram stated rather vaguely that no contact with SS troops was to be made. The garrison commander started moving his troops out. Another telegram from FROMM arrived, urging execution of the troop movement with the greatest possible speed. No one knew what this all meant. Later in the day a telegram from HITLER arrived, ordering all troop movements to cease. The garrison commander ignored the telegram since he reasoned that he had to take his orders from his immediate superior rather than from a political figurehead. Later when he was put before a military court he had to be acquitted because in no way could it be shown that he had acted incorrectly in following FROMM's orders. But for good measure, HITLER ordered him reduced from the rank of Col to rank of Capt and assigned to a Penal Bn for a probationary period.

Thus, before the invasion of Poland, and later the Scandinavian countries and France, he was perfectly uninhibited by any of these considerations which make the specialist so earth-bound. German staff officers admit that he was the one that provided the momentum of recklessness and dare-deviledness which so characterized German strategic moves at that time. The general staff was frankly astonished when these operations were so patently successful. They conceded that HITLER had been right, and a few of them even began to believe that HITLER possessed some inexplicable intuition which perceived things in military plans which to them were just cut-and-dry problems. Thus the opposition of the general staff was not so strong anymore when HITLER decided that he again sensed something which to his mind minimized the difficulty of operations against Russia.

HITLER at one time discoursed at length with PW on the reasons why he never married. HITLER told him that he could not allow the care for a family to interfere with his duties of statesmanship. HITLER truly believed himself wedded to the German nation.

(iv) HITLER as a Military Leader

Before the war broke out HITLER considered himself anything but a great military leader. It must be admitted, however, that he was very technically minded and he was outstanding in recognizing the importance of mechanized equipment in modern warfare. Thus when GUDERIAN propounded his radically new theories on armored warfare, it was HITLER especially that recognized their merit and brought his influence to bear in order to overcome the traditional stodginess of the Prussian general staff in matters of technical improvement. Through his ability to view highly complex problems without the reserve and caution of the expert, he was capable of seeing things and saying things that startled his professional military leaders.

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Later, when the Germany Army stood before STALINGRAD, HITLER was seized by a fanatical determination to take that city. Probably the name of the city had a good deal to do with goading him. When the Sixth Army was encircled his staff officers advised him to pull the army back. Even when the Russian forces around the army had grown to a ring 50 km wide. PAULUS asked urgently for permission to push his army back into the German lines. PAULUS was so embittered when this was refused that he remarked that he had been betrayed.

A vastly different matter was the publicity campaign in Germany which extolled HITLER as the greatest military genius of all times. This campaign was touched off by GOERING, and radio and press jangled with this new eulogy of the Fuehrer. And while the military experts could only shake their head over his good guesses, political circles and the whole of Germany resounded to this praise of the great military genius. Strangely enough, HITLER himself became very susceptible to this propaganda. He then actually started believing that he was a man of exceptional ability in the science of warfare. When he drew the Luftwaffe away from its assault on England, he was convinced that after the conquest of Russia which would take from 3-6 months, he would be able to launch a new, more concentrated and final attack upon England. It was to no avail that a Japanese military commission appeared before him and warned him not to attack Russia, since, based upon Japan's own experience with China, it was practically impossible to conquer a country of such huge geographical dimensions. Several of the staff officers pleaded with him to stay away from Russia since the German army, strong as it might be, would lose itself in the vastness of Russia like a river in the desert. But HITLER knew he was right.

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STALINGRAD was a turning point for HITLER in more ways than one. HITLER turned completely into himself. He became sullen, more short-tempered. Those familiar suppers to which he used to invite the inner circle, fell away. His nightly walk in front of his bunker became longer. He was more and more alone. It seemed that in any discussion of military setbacks he sensed criticism of his own leadership. At one time HITLER, quite oblivious of what he was doing, ordered certain units to concentrate on a certain town. The result was a fantastic concentration of armour in a small sector. In the confusion that resulted HITLER asked that the Corps commander be court-martialled. A general staff officer with HITLER pointed out that he, HITLER himself, had ordered this maneuver. "Where do you read that?" HITLER snarled in quick rage. "In the war diary", the staff officer replied. HITLER did not say anything else, but on the same day the officers of the war history section received strictest orders that in the future no reference was to be made to HITLER's orders in operational matters in the war diary, and that his interference in operations was not even to be referred to by implication. Furthermore, he ordered that six stenographers be on hand at all times to take down verbally the operational discussions, briefings, etc, in the operations room. The stenographic reports were typed in one copy only (in the special large type for HITLER's use since he was far-sighted), and after a staff officer spent considerable time in correcting the transcript (the stenographers employed had no training for this type of work), HITLER locked this

single copy in his own safe to which only he had access thereafter. It was a weapon which HITLER wanted to have in battling the keen minds of his generals.

PW was emphatic in his belief that in 1939 HITLER did NOT have the slightest aspiration for world domination. His mind was that of a typical Austrian-land-bound and awkward in perceiving any interests beyond those of the continent. For this reason the question of German colonies was never given any great emphasis. When HITLER contemplated the invasion of POLAND the staff officers were for a large part against the move; because they feared that ENGLAND would make good her threat to enter the war on the side of POLAND. BLOMBERG advised HITLER earlier that NOT until 1942, would GERMANY be ready for the type of war which this move entailed. HITLER however was naively convinced that the operation would be confined to POLAND itself. He did NOT think for one moment that ENGLAND (which he always had respected and feared very much) would set herself up against his plans. Such was HITLER's mentality at that time that he thought the Polish campaign would be a matter of about two months, and after that he would be able to undertake the grandiloquent architectural plans for GERMANY (which he had already set in motion by razing the centre of BERLIN to make room for a great architectural pageant). It may be that this architectural hobby of his was replaced by his aspirations to become history's great military genius. (Prior to the war it had been observed that HITLER would lock himself up in his room for three days at a time, after which he would come forth with his drawings for some great public building. PW who saw some of these plans did not think that they bore witness to any but mediocre talent).

An entirely different chapter is the relationship of fealty in which the German officers corps found itself toward HITLER after some time. It is probably the outstanding example to show how much political cunning the men really possessed. There is no doubt that in the beginning, in 1933, the Wehrmacht had HITLER well in hand. Then, with infinite patience, HITLER began to lay openings into the otherwise so impregnable fortress of military tradition. Take for instance von BRAUCHITSCH's divorce. His wife, with whom he had been living in indifference, would not grant him a divorce. He had grown fond of, or in love with, a woman of otherwise impeccable background. The rule in the Prussian officers corps was that any officer who is guilty of the grounds of divorce and actually is divorced, is to be expelled from the corps. In this quandary BRAUCHITSCH went to HITLER. The latter notified BRAUCHITSCH's wife that it would be advisable to consent to the divorce, and he made a financial settlement upon her. BRAUCHITSCH remarried, but the price he paid was an expensive moral obligation towards HITLER of which he later was emphatically reminded. Many cases of such intercession in favour of important military personalities succeeded in bringing them into a relationship of personal dependence to HITLER. Generally, HITLER accomplished a lot to improve the financial status of the officers corps, to raise its social prestige as a profession. Everything was done to get the officers' corps in a frame of mind where it felt that it could only derive benefits from this alliance with HITLER. On the other hand, negatively it was shown by ominous examples, first only sporadically, then generally, what it meant to run afoul of the trust that the Fuehrer had put in his officers. BLOMBERG and FRITSCH, who disagreed with the Polish campaign, and 2 years later BRAUCHITSCH, who raised objections to the Russian venture, were men that received hard retaliatory blows. High-ranking army officers that relied on their own initiative in many important matters, received a cool official nod if they were successful, courts-martial if something went wrong; it was a policy to stifle completely all feeling of independence and initiative on the part of the officers. It meant that within their own profession they had to take orders from the political faction. The introduction of the HITLER salute as a military salute, the NSFO as a political check on the officers in the field, were just milestones in this development. PW remarked that the German officers lacked civil courage (Zivil-courage), -the courage to stand up and defend their conviction and professional integrity; but anyone who had the courage faced the alternative of the hangman's knot. The majority of them chose to stay on the safe side as long as they could claim before themselves and the world that they were merely fulfilling their soldierly duty.

(v) What HITLER Thinks of STALIN

Once in a while HITLER would talk about his Russian adversary. He would invariably say: "What a man. I respect him". ("Das ist doch ein Mordskerl. Den kann man nur respektieren"). At other times he would refer to him as that "Cunning Georgian". PW had the impression that HITLER trusted him in that STALIN would stick to his treaty obligations.

(vi) HITLER and Providence

It is a mistake to assume that HITLER's frequent reference to "Providence" and "God" in his speeches are mere catch phrases of expediency. He sincerely believed in his own calling by providence, and that it was guiding his hand in statesmanship, protecting him and his German people. At no time was his belief so strong, however, as after the 20th of July 1944. Even looking at that incident soberly, it must be admitted that it was almost a miraculous circumstance that HITLER, who stood closest to the bomb, got away completely unscathed, while men standing much further away were killed or seriously hurt. To him it was the most palpable proof offered yet that he was a specially chosen instrument of divine providence. This tremendous mystical experience, rather than the approaching German doom, is the reason why the reference to the supernatural has become more and more frequent in his later speeches. And this escape from almost certain death which he could only see as direct divine interference is not the least factor in HITLER's unbelievable reserve of power of resistance which has remained unbroken even in the most trying times of recent months. HITLER cannot acknowledge defeat, ever, because to him it would mean declining his provident mission.