

Last Day of June 1934Last Day of June 1934

In early June, 1934 Ernst Roehm (chief of staff of Germany's Sturmabteilung) had a confrontation with Hitler which reportedly lasted for nearly 5 hours. Hitler had been under the impression that forces within the SA were preparing a Bolshevik action he felt would bring only trouble for Germany. Hitler stated that

Roehm left him with assurances that he would do everything possible to put things right. Hitler later felt that Roehm's real intentions were to begin preparations to eliminate him personally.

A day or two later Hitler told the SA to go on leave for the entire month of July. During this time they were not to wear uniforms or engage in parades or exercises.

On June 7 Roehm announced he was going on sick leave. Before leaving, however, he issued a warning. "If the enemies of the S.A. hope that the S.A. will not be recalled, or will be recalled only in part after its leave, we may permit them to enjoy this brief hope. They will receive their answer at such time and in such form as appears necessary. The S.A. is and remains the destiny of Germany." This statement did nothing to calm Hitler's fears.

Before he left Berlin Roehm asked Hitler to meet with him in Wiessee on June 30 to discuss the situation. Hitler agreed.

In a speech given on June 17 at the University of Marburg Franz von Papen called for an end to the revolution and to the Nazi terror as well as a return of some freedom.

Goebbels, who was Minister of Propaganda, tried to see that the speech was a little known as possible. He forbade the rebroadcast of the speech as well as any reference to it in the press. Police seized copies of papers that were already on the streets with a partial text. Foreign correspondents had been given copies of the text, however, so word got out.

Hitler was worried, to put it mildly. As a result of this speech Hindenberg (President of Germany) was threatening to institute marshall law. This would have ruined Hitler's plans to succeed Hindenberg. If the Army took over control it would mean the end of the Nazi government.

Hitler was hesitant, because he owed much of his career to the support of S.A. leaders. Goering and Himmler had scores they wanted to settle, however. They convinced Hitler that Roehm wanted to start a putsch. Hitler ordered Himmler to suppress the action in Bavaria, and Goering was to handle Berlin.

On June 25 General von Fritsch put the army in a state of alert, cancelling all leaves and confining the troops to their barracks.

One June 28 Roehm was expelled from the German Officers League. That evening Goebbels reported "threatening intelligence". This set off a chain of events that led Hitler to believe only drastic intervention would stifle the impending revolt.

On the morning of June 30, 1934 Hitler and Goebbels arrived at the hotel in Wiessee where Roehm and his lieutenants were staying in preparation for the planned meeting with Hitler. Roehm's people were dragged out of bed, taken outside the hotel, and shot. Roehm was stripped to the waist and shot point blank by S.A. officers.

Meanwhile, approximately 150 S.A. leaders were rounded up in Berlin and shot by Himmler's S.S.

The total number of people killed in this purge varies from account to account. Shortly after the incident Hitler announced that 61 persons were shot, 13 died resisting arrest and 3 committed suicide. At the Munich trial in 1957 a figure of more than 1000 was given.

Although Hitler was convinced that Roehm and the S.A. were plotting against him, there is no evidence that this was actually the case.

The cooperation of the army generals in the purge of 6/30/34 put them in no

position to oppose future Nazi acts of terrorism. They had become the backing to Hitler's claim that he was the law in Germany. Hindenberg died 8/2/34 - and at noon that day it was announced that the offices of Chancellor and President had been combined. Adolf Hitler had taken over the powers of Head of State and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces. He would be known as Fuhrer and Reich Chancellor. To leave no loopholes, Hitler had all officers and men of the armed forces swear allegiance - not to Germany or to the Constitution - but to HIM personally.

Recommended reading:

The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich by William Shirer

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