

# DEFEATING HITLER



**WHITEHALL'S  
SECRET REPORT ON  
WHY HITLER LOST  
THE WAR**

**PAUL WINTER**

# Defeating Hitler



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**Whitehall's Secret Report  
on Why Hitler Lost the War**

*Paul Winter*



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*Defeating Hitler is dedicated to my Grandfather, Lionel Watson,  
who, as a young gunner in the 10<sup>th</sup> Medium Regiment,  
Royal Artillery, experienced at close-quarters the full-might  
of Hitler's war machine on the battlefields of Normandy,  
the Low Countries and Nazi Germany.*





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# Chronology of Events: 1933–45

## 1933

- 30 January Adolf Hitler appointed Chancellor of Germany
- 22 March First concentration camp for political opponents is set up at Dachau
- 27 April Hitler appoints Rudolf Hess his official deputy for all matters concerning the NSDAP
- 14 October Hitler announces on German radio his intention to leave the League of Nations

## 1934

- 2 June Hitler orders the C-in-C of the German Navy, Admiral Erich Raeder, to keep the construction of U-Boats a secret
- 6 June Hitler orders the expansion of the *Reichswehr* from 100,000 to 300,000 men
- 30 June 'Night of the Long Knives' leading SA figures such as Ernst Rohm and opponents of the Nazi regime are murdered by Himmler's SS in a bloody purge
- 25 July Austrian Nazis attempt a *coup d'état* in Austria during which Chancellor Dollfuss is murdered
- 2 August President Paul von Hindenburg dies
- 2 August Soldiers of the *Reichswehr* ordered to swear an oath of personal allegiance to Hitler
- 4 August Hitler appoints himself Supreme Commander of the *Reichswehr*
- 13 December Hermann Goering appointed Hitler's deputy and successor in the event of the Führer's death

## 1935

- 9 March The existence of the *Luftwaffe* is revealed
- 16 March German military conscription is reintroduced in flagrant breach of the Treaty of Versailles
- 18 June Anglo-German Naval Agreement signed limiting German Naval construction to 35% of total British tonnage for the Royal Navy

## 1936

7 March	German forces re-occupy the demilitarized Rhineland
June	British Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) set up
17 June	Heinrich Himmler promoted to head of the entire German police force
11 August	Hitler appoints Joachim von Ribbentrop German Ambassador to Britain
18 October	Hitler signs the directive for the Four-Year Plan of which Goering is placed in charge
25 November	Germany and Japan sign the Anti-Comintern Pact
25 December	Dr Theo Morell appointed Hitler's personal physician

## 1937

25–29 September	Mussolini's first state visit to Germany
5 November	Hitler holds a secret military conference attended by leading Nazis and military commanders at which he sets out his long-term politico-military aims. The Führer's military adjutant, Colonel Hossbach, compiles a memorandum on the meeting detailing the extent of Hitler's ambitions

## 1938

4 February	Hitler appoints himself Reich War Minister and abolishes the Reich War Ministry replacing it with the <i>Oberkommando der Wehrmacht</i> (the Armed Forces High Command) with General Wilhelm Keitel as its head
12 March	Hitler invades Austria during Operation 'Otto' thereby securing the <i>Anschluss</i> (Annexation) of his native country
18 August	General Ludwig Beck, Chief of the Army General Staff, resigns over Hitler's plan (Case Green) to invade Czechoslovakia. The Führer appoints General Franz Halder as Beck's replacement
15 September	British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain flies to Munich in order to dissuade Hitler from going to war over Czechoslovakia
22 September	Chamberlain flies again to Germany and meets the Nazi leader in Bad Godesberg in order to broker a deal over the Sudetenland
29 September	Munich Agreement signed by Nazi Germany, Great Britain, France and Italy
1 October	German Army occupies the Sudetenland

## 1939

16 March	Hitler invades Czechoslovakia and marches into Prague
23 August	Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact signed by Ribbentrop and Molotov
1 September	Hitler invades Poland
3 September	Great Britain declares war on Nazi Germany

9 November Two officers from the British Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), Major Stevens and Captain Best are kidnapped by the German *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD) at the town of Venlo on the Dutch-German border. Best and Stevens were deceived into thinking they were dealing with anti-Hitler elements within the *Wehrmacht*

## 1940

9 April German forces invade Norway and Denmark  
 10 May Winston Churchill becomes Prime Minister and Minister of Defence. Hitler launches his Blitzkrieg in the West against Holland, Belgium, France and Luxembourg  
 10 June Italy declares war on Britain  
 23 June France capitulates  
 10 July Official start of the Battle of Britain  
 16 July The Special Operations Executive (SOE) is created to 'set Europe ablaze'  
 12 August As a prelude to an invasion of Britain Hermann Goering's *Luftwaffe* launch 'Adler Tag' (Eagle Day) intended to destroy the RAF  
 13 September Italians invade Egypt  
 31 October Official end of the Battle of Britain  
 26 November Future Operations Enemy Section (FOES) set up to draft strategic assessments for the JIC and Chiefs of Staff

## 1941

12 February Rommel and the *Afrika Korps* arrive in Tripoli  
 7 March British troops arrive in Greece  
 22 March Creation of the Axis Planning Section (APS), successor to the FOES  
 6 April Germans invade Yugoslavia and Greece  
 29 April British forces evacuate Greece  
 10 May Deputy Führer, Rudolf Hess, parachutes into Scotland ostensibly on a peace mission  
 15 May Formation of the Joint Intelligence Staff (JIS) successor to the APS  
 20 May German airborne troops attack Crete  
 22 June The launch of Operation *Barbarossa* the German invasion of the Soviet Union  
 14 August Atlantic Charter signed by Roosevelt and Churchill  
 7 December Japanese surprise attack on US Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor. American declaration of war against Japan  
 8 December German Army Group Centre offensive halted before Moscow  
 11 December Hitler declares war on the United States  
 19 December Hitler appoints himself Commander-in-Chief of the Army

## 1942

- 15 February The surrender of the British and Commonwealth garrison at Singapore
- 28 March British Commandos raid the dry-dock at St Nazaire in France (Operation *Chariot*) in order to prevent its use by the Tirpitz and other German raiders
- 21 June Fall of Tobruk
- 30 June Rommel checked at El Alamein
- 19 August British and Canadian forces raid Dieppe during Operation *Jubilee*. German Army Group B besieges the symbolic city of Stalingrad
- 25 September Hitler dismisses General Franz Halder as Chief of the Army General Staff OKH
- 23 October General Erwin Rommel's *Afrika Korps* is attacked by General Montgomery's 8th Army at the Battle of El Alamein in North Africa
- 8 November Anglo-American forces land in North-West Africa during Operation *Torch*

## 1943

- 14 January President Roosevelt and Winston Churchill call for the 'unconditional surrender' of Germany and her Axis allies at the Casablanca conference
- 30 January Admiral Doenitz replaces Admiral Erich Raeder as Commander-in- Chief of the German Navy
- 31 January Field Marshal von Paulus's German Sixth Army surrenders to the Red Army at Stalingrad
- 19 February German forces attack the Americans at the Kasserine Pass
- 11 May Third Washington meeting between Roosevelt and Churchill codenamed 'Trident'
- 13 May German surrender in Tunisia
- 16/17 May Lancaster bombers from the RAF's 617 Squadron attack the strategically important Mohne, Eder and Sorpe Dams in the Ruhr
- 23 May Doenitz withdraws U-Boats from the Battle of the Atlantic
- 4 July Hitler launches Operation *Citadel* on the Eastern Front in order to eradicate the Kursk salient. The battle of Kursk becomes the greatest tank battle in history
- 10 July Allies land in Sicily during Operation *Husky*
- 25 July Mussolini deposed and arrested
- 17 August Quebec Conference, codenamed 'Quadrant', attended by the British, American and Canadian governments
- 9 September Allies land at Salerno during Operation *Avalanche*
- 1 October Allies enter Naples
- 22 November Cairo Conference ('Sextant') attended by Roosevelt, Churchill and Chiang Kai-Shek
- 28 November Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin meet at Tehren ('Eureka') to discuss Allied strategy

**1944**

22 January	Allies land at Anzio during Operation <i>Shingle</i>
18 March	Germans occupy Hungary
11 May	Operation <i>Diadem</i> Allied offensive in Italy
4 June	General Mark Clark's 5th US Army enters Rome
6 June	The Allies launch Operation <i>Overlord</i> , the greatest seaborne invasion in history along the Normandy coast
13 June	First V-1 pilotless rocket lands in London
20 July	Colonel Count Claus von Stauffenberg attempts to assassinate Hitler by means of a bomb planted at the <i>Führerhauptquartier</i> (FHQ), the <i>Wolfsschanze</i> (Wolf's Lair) in Rastenburg, East Prussia
25 July	Operation <i>Cobra</i> commences heralding Allied breakout of Normandy
13–20 August	Battle of Falaise Pocket in Normandy
15 August	Operation <i>Dragoon</i> is launched by the Allies in southern France
25 August	Paris is liberated by the US 4th Infantry Division and General Leclerc's Free French 2nd Armoured Division
3 September	Brussels liberated by the British Second Army
4 September	The strategically important port of Antwerp is captured by British Second Army
8 September	V-2 rockets are fired on London for the first time
17 September	The ill-fated Operation <i>Market Garden</i> commences in Holland
26 September	British 1st Airborne Division is ordered to withdraw from Arnhem
1–8 November	The Dutch island of Walcheren cleared by British and Canadian forces during Operation <i>Infatuate</i>
16 December	Hitler launches Operation <i>Herbstnebel</i> ('Autumn Mist') in the Ardennes signalling the last major German offensive in the West

**1945**

1 January	Operation <i>Bodenplatte</i> – the <i>Luftwaffe</i> mounts its last major air offensive in the West against Allied airfields
4 February	Yalta Conference ('Argonaut') attended by Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin
23 March	Allies cross the Rhine during Operation <i>Plunder</i>
12 April	Death of President Roosevelt
29 April	German surrender in Italy
30 April	Hitler commits suicide in the Führer bunker, Berlin
8 May	VE Day
17 July	Potsdam Conference convenes in Berlin
6 August	First Atomic Bomb dropped on the Japanese city of Hiroshima
9 August	Second Atomic bomb dropped on the Japanese city of Nagasaki
15 August	VJ Day



## *Dramatis Personae*

### **Werner von Blomberg (1878–1946)**

*Generalfeldmarschall* von Blomberg. Appointed Minister of Defence in 1933 and Minister of War and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces in 1935. In April 1936 he became Hitler's first Field Marshal. Forced to resign in 1938 due to a personal scandal involving his second wife, von Blomberg played no major role in the Second World War but was captured by the Allies in 1945. He subsequently gave evidence against leading Nazis at the Nuremberg War Crime Trials. He died in March 1946 while in Allied custody.

### **Martin Bormann (1900–45)**

Appointed Reich Leader of the Nazi Party in 1933. Private Secretary to Rudolf Hess from 1933 to 1941. Promoted to Head of the Party Chancellery following the mysterious flight to Scotland by Hess in May 1941. Appointed *Reichsminister* in charge of the Party Secretariat and Staff 1942. Chosen by Hitler to be his Private Secretary in April 1943. Selected as commander of the *Volkssturm* (People's Army) October 1944. One of the last to escape the Führer bunker in May 1945, Bormann's whereabouts and ultimate fate remained a mystery obliging the International Criminal Court at Nuremberg to condemn him to death *in absentia* in October 1946. It was not until 1972, however, that his remains were discovered by workmen in Berlin.

## Walther von Brauchitsch (1881–1948)

*Generalfeldmarschall* von Brauchitsch. Commander-in-Chief Army (*Oberbefehlshaber des Heers*) from 4 February 1938 until 19 December 1941 when he was forced to resign by Hitler following the failure of Army Group Centre to capture Moscow. Charged with war crimes after the war, Brauchitsch died in British captivity on 18 October 1948 before he could be tried.

## Wilhelm Canaris (1887–1945)

Admiral Canaris, Chief of the *Abwehr* from 1935 to 1944. Naval officer, anti-Nazi conspirator and sub-source of intelligence for the British Secret Service. Arrested in July 1944, Canaris was eventually hanged at Flossenburg concentration camp on 9 April 1945 for his indirect involvement with the July Bomb Plot conspiracy against Hitler.

## Karl Doenitz (1891–1980)

Grand Admiral Doenitz. Commander of U-Boats, 1 January 1936 to 1 May 1945. Commander-in-Chief *Kriegsmarine*, 30 January 1943 to 1 May 1945. Commander-in-Chief Operations (North) 17 April 1945 to 23 May 1945. Appointed Hitler's successor and became *Reichspräsident* and Commander-in-Chief of Armed Forces, 1 May 1945 to 23 May 1945. Sentenced at Nuremberg to ten years' imprisonment in 1947. Released from prison in October 1956.

## Joseph Goebbels (1897–1945)

Journalist and Doctor of Philosophy in Literature. One of Hitler's closest associates and a leading anti-Semite. Became a member of the Nazi Party in 1924. Made Gauleiter of Berlin in October 1926. Reich Minister of Propaganda from 1933 to 1945, and from July 1944 onwards General Plenipotentiary for Total War. Committed suicide with his wife and family in Berlin on 1 May 1945.

## Hermann Goering (1893–1946)

First World War fighter ace. Reichsminister for Air. Commander-in-Chief of the *Luftwaffe* from 1933 to 1945. Appointed Plenipotentiary for the implementation of the Four Year Plan for Re-armament in 1936. *Reichsmarschall* and deputy/successor to Hitler. Captured by the Americans in May 1945, Goering was sentenced to death at the Nuremberg War Crime Trials in October 1946 but committed suicide before the sentence was carried out.

## Heinz Guderian (1888–1954)

*Generaloberst* Guderian. Pioneer of armoured warfare and leading proponent of the Panzer and *Blitzkrieg*. Commander of XIX Panzer Corps during the Polish and French campaigns of September 1939 to June 1940. Commander 2nd Panzer Army from 5 October 1941 to 25 December 1941. Dismissed by Hitler in December 1941 for criticizing German strategy. Rehabilitated in February 1943 and appointed Inspector-General of Armoured Troops. Chief of Army General Staff from 21 July 1944 to 28 March 1945. Dismissed again by Hitler for insubordination. Captured by US troops in May 1945 but not charged with war crimes. Released from custody as a prisoner of war in June 1948.

## Franz Halder (1884–1972)

*Generaloberst* Halder. Chief of the Army General Staff from 1 November 1938 until 24 September 1942 when he was dismissed by Hitler and replaced by *Generaloberst* Kurt Zeitzler. Implicated in the July Bomb Plot of 1944, Halder was arrested by the *Gestapo* and placed in Flossenburg and Dachau concentration camps. He was later transferred to Tyrol where he was liberated by US forces on 5 May 1945. He spent the next two years as a prisoner of war and gave evidence against leading Nazis at the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials. He later became an advisor to the US Army Historical Division and to the new West German Army.



## Rudolf Hess (1894–1987)

Deputy Führer of the Nazi Party. First World War fighter pilot. Joined the Nazi Party in 1921 as one of its earliest members. Imprisoned with Hitler in Landsberg Prison following the failed ‘Beer Hall Putsch’ of November 1923, Hess became the Nazi leader’s private secretary transcribing and editing *Mein Kampf*. Appointed deputy Führer on Hitler’s accession to power in 1933 thereby becoming one of the most powerful figures in the Third Reich. Disillusioned with Germany’s war with Britain, Hess flew to Scotland on 10 May 1941 in order to broker a peace deal. Disowned by Hitler, he spent the rest of the war in British captivity and was tried at Nuremberg in 1946 for war crimes. Sentenced to life imprisonment, Hess spent the next 41 years in Spandau Prison in Berlin where he committed suicide on 17 August 1987.

## Reinhard Heydrich (1904–42)

*SS-Obergruppenführer und General der Polizei* Heydrich. Nicknamed ‘the Hangman’ and ‘the Butcher of Prague’. Chief of the Reich Main Security Office (RSHA) from September 1939 to 4 June 1942. President of Interpol from 24 August 1940 to 4 June 1942. Chairman of the Wannsee Conference on the ‘Final Solution’ to the ‘Jewish problem’ 20 January 1942. Deputy Protector of Bohemia and Moravia from 29 September 1941 to 4 June 1942. Mortally wounded in Prague by Special Operations Executive (SOE) trained Czech patriots on 27 May 1942. Died of wounds on 4 June 1942 in the Czech capital.

## Heinrich Himmler (1900–45)

*Reichsführer-SS* from 1929 to 1945. Became head of the Gestapo in 1936 and Minister of the Interior from 1943 to 1945. One of the most powerful figures in the Third Reich and much feared by his Nazi colleagues, Himmler was one of Hitler’s most trusted lieutenants. As such, he was instrumental in executing the Führer’s orders for the ‘Final Solution’ to the ‘Jewish problem’. Appointed Commander of the Replacement (Home) Army in July 1944. Commanded both the Army Group Upper Rhine in December 1944 and Army Group Vistula in January 1945. Discovered to have been negotiating a separate peace with the

Allies, Himmler was stripped of all his Party and state offices by Hitler, who ordered his arrest. On the run from both the Nazis and the Allies, Himmler was finally captured by the British on 22 May 1945, but committed suicide the next day while in their custody.

## **Adolf Hitler (1889–1945)**

Austrian-born artist, writer, German politician, First World War veteran and leader of the Nazi Party from 1921 to 1945. Chancellor of Germany from January 1933 to April 1945, and head of State (Führer) from August 1934 to April 1945. Supreme Commander of Germany's Armed Forces from February 1938 to April 1945. Committed suicide in Berlin on 30 April 1945.

## **Alfred Jodl (1890–1946)**

*Generaloberst* Jodl. Chief of Operations Staff of the High Command of the Armed Forces (OKW) from 1939 to 1945. One of Hitler's closest military advisers, Jodl drafted many of the 74 Führer Directives issued during the war. Condemned to death at Nuremberg and hanged on 16 October 1946.

## **Ernst Kaltenbrunner (1903–46)**

*Obergruppenführer und General der Polizei und Waffen SS* Dr Kaltenbrunner. Appointed Chief of the Security Police and SD (RSHA) on 30 January 1943. One of Himmler's trusted subordinates. Captured by the Americans in May 1945 and sentenced to death at Nuremberg for war crimes. Executed on 16 October 1946.

## **Wilhelm Keitel (1882–1946)**

*Generalfeldmarschall* Keitel. Chief of the High Command of Armed Forces (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*) from 1939 to 1945. Nicknamed 'lackey' due to his servility towards Hitler, Keitel was the dictator's most senior military adviser. Condemned to death at Nuremberg and hanged on 16 October 1946.

## Albert Kesselring (1885–1960)

*Generalfeldmarschall* Kesselring. Commander-in-Chief Armed Forces South (Mediterranean), 2 December 1941 to 10 March 1945. Commander-in-Chief Armed Forces West from 11 March to 25 March 1945. Commander-in-Chief Armed Forces South from 25 March to 6 May 1945. Condemned to death for war crimes by a British Military court in Venice in February 1947. Death sentence commuted to life imprisonment in October 1947. Pardoned and released from prison in October 1952 due to ill-health.

## Erich von Manstein (1887–1973)

*Generalfeldmarschall* von Manstein. Hitler's finest military strategist. Commander Army Group II from 18 September 1941 to 21 November 1942. Commander Army Group Don from 28 November 1942 to 14 February 1943. Commander Army Group South from 14 February 1943 to 30 March 1944. Dismissed by Hitler on 30 March 1944 due to divergences of opinion on German strategy. Replaced as C-in-C Army Group South by *Generalfeldmarschall* Walther Model. Although retired von Manstein was arrested by British troops in August 1945 and subsequently tried for war crimes before a British Military Tribunal in Hamburg in August 1949. Sentenced to 18 years in prison, later commuted to 12, von Manstein was eventually released in May 1953 on medical grounds.

## Erhard Milch (1892–1972)

*Generalfeldmarschall* Milch. Appointed State Secretary of the Reich Aviation Ministry in 1933. Oversaw the development of the *Luftwaffe* during the inter-war period. Commanded *Luftflotte* 5 during the Norwegian campaign and was promoted in 1941 to the post of Air Inspector General following Ernst Udet's suicide. In 1947, Milch was tried at Nuremberg for war crimes and received a sentence of life imprisonment later commuted to 15 years. Released in June 1954.

## Benito Mussolini (1883–1945)

Leader of the National Fascist Party in Italy. Made Prime Minister of Italy 1922. Known as *Il Duce* from 1925 onwards. Declared war on Britain and France on 10 June 1940. Deposed on 24 July 1943 by the Fascist Grand Council. Arrested and detained at Gran Sasso he was eventually rescued by *SS-Obersturmbannführer* Otto Skorzeny on 12 September 1943. Head of State of the Italian Social Republic from 23 September 1943 to 25 April 1945. Mussolini and his mistress, Clara Petacchi, were eventually captured by Communist Partisans near Lake Como on 27 April 1945. They were duly executed and their bodies hung upside down outside a petrol station in Milan.

## Erich Raeder (1876–1960)

Admiral Raeder. Commander-in-Chief *Kriegsmarine* from 1935 until 1943 when he was replaced by Grand Admiral Karl Doenitz. Sentenced to life imprisonment at Nuremberg in 1946. Released in 1955.

## Joachim von Ribbentrop (1893–1946)

Soldier, journalist and champagne salesman. Friend of one-time German Chancellor, Franz von Papen. First met Hitler in 1928 and joined the Nazi Party in May 1932. Became foreign policy advisor to Hitler and later Reich Minister Ambassador-Plenipotentiary at Large (1935–36). Negotiated the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935. German Ambassador to the Court of St James's from October 1936 to February 1938. Created Reich Minister for Foreign Affairs on 4 February 1938 holding the post until 30 April 1945. Signatory to the Nazi-Soviet Pact of August 1939. Captured in June 1945 and tried for war crimes at Nuremberg in October 1946. Found guilty and hanged on 16 October 1946.

## Erwin Rommel (1891–1944)

*Generalfeldmarschall* Rommel. Commander of 7th Panzer Division during the French Campaign of May–June 1940, Rommel came to prominence commanding the *Deutsche Afrika Korps* during the North African campaign of

1941 to 1943. Nicknamed the 'Desert Fox', Rommel was given command of Army Group E in Greece in April 1943 and in November 1943 was sent to France to take up the post of commander of Army Group B with instructions to prevent the Allies from landing successfully on the west coast of Europe. Implicated in the July Bomb Plot of 1944 Rommel was forced to commit suicide in October 1944.

## Gerd von Rundstedt (1875–1953)

*Generalfeldmarschall* von Rundstedt. Commander of Army Group South during the Polish campaign of September 1939. Commander of Army Group South during Operation *Barbarossa*, the invasion of the Soviet Union June 1941. Suffering a heart attack in November 1941, von Rundstedt was replaced by *Generalfeldmarschall* Walther Reichenau. Recalled from retirement in March 1942, von Rundstedt was appointed Commander-in-Chief West. Replaced by *Generalfeldmarschall* Günther von Kluge on 2 July 1944, who in turn was succeeded by *Generalfeldmarschall* Walther Model on 16 August 1944, von Rundstedt was reappointed Commander-in-Chief West on 1 September 1944. Finally relieved of his command in March 1945 after urging Hitler to make peace with the Allies. Captured by US forces in May 1945, he was charged with war crimes by the British. However, he was later released in July 1948 due to ill-health.

## Walter Schellenberg (1910–52)

*SS-Brigadeführer* Schellenberg. Pre-war counter-intelligence officer in the SD. Personal aide to Heinrich Himmler and deputy leader under Reinhard Heydrich of the RSHA from 1939 to 1942. Architect of the 'Venlo Incident' in November 1939 when two SIS officers were abducted at the Dutch-German border town by Schellenberg's men. Appointed head of foreign intelligence in 1944 following the abolition of the *Abwehr* and its absorption into the RSHA. Captured by the British in Denmark in 1945 he subsequently gave evidence against leading Nazis at the Nuremberg Trials. Convicted of war crimes in 1949 at the 'Ministries Trial', Schellenberg was sentenced to six years' imprisonment. Released in 1951 on health grounds he died in 1952 of liver cancer.

## Hans von Seeckt (1866–1936)

*Generaloberst* von Seeckt. Member of the Prussian General Staff from 1897. Chief of Staff of the Army from 1919 to 1920. Chief organizer and architect of the *Reichswehr*, the 100,000 strong army allowed Germany by the Versailles Treaty of 1919. Commander-in-Chief of the *Reichswehr* from 1920 to 1926. Member of the Reichstag from 1930 to 1932 subsequently aligning himself with the Nazis. Military adviser to Chiang Kai-Shek in China from 1934 to 1935.

## Albert Speer (1905–81)

Professor of Architecture. Appointed Inspector General of the Reich in 1937. Became Reich minister for Armaments and War Production following the death of Fritz Todt in February 1942. Member of Doenitz's short-lived 'Flensburg Government', May 1945. Condemned at Nuremberg for war crimes in 1946 and sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment. Released in October 1966.

## Dr Fritz Todt (1891–1942)

Civil Engineer. Inspector General German Roadways, July 1933. Founder of 'Organisation Todt' (public works system) 1938. Creator of the Siegfried Line 1938 to 1940. *Reichsminister* for Armaments and Munitions from March 1940 until his death in an air accident on 8 February 1942.

## Ernst Udet (1896–1941)

*Generaloberst* Udet. First World War fighter ace. A member of the Nazi Party from 1933 Udet became a leading advocate of the *Luftwaffe* in the inter-war period becoming in 1936 head of the Reich Air Ministry's development branch. Promoted again in 1939 to the position of the *Luftwaffe's* Director-General of Equipment Udet committed suicide in November 1941 due largely to an increasingly fractious relationship with Hermann Goering.

**Walter Warlimont (1894–1976)**

*General der Artillerie* Warlimont. Deputy Chief of Operations Staff (*Wehrmachtführungsstab*, WFSt, Armed Forces Operations Staff) from November 1938 to September 1944. Sentenced to life imprisonment at Nuremberg in 1948. Released in 1954.

**Kurt Zeitzler (1895–1963)**

*Generaloberst* Zeitzler. Chief of Staff XXII Korps of XIV Army from 1939 to 1940. Chief of Staff *Panzergruppe* A from 1940 to 1941. Chief of Staff 1st Panzer Army 1941 to 1942. Chief of Staff to Commander-in-Chief West 1942. Chief of Staff Army Group D 1942. Succeeded Franz Halder as Chief of the Army General Staff. Served in this role from 24 September 1942 to 20 July 1944 when he resigned through ill-health. Remained on the 'Reserve List' for the rest of the war. Dismissed from the Army by Hitler in January 1945. Made a British PoW in 1947.



## *Foreword*

I have been looking forward to this moment since I first caught a whiff of this fascinating document in Noel Annan's *Changing Enemies* in 1995. I can remember encouraging Paul Winter to go and find it at The National Archives when he set out on what has proved to be his own highly fruitful search for the documentary trail of secret Whitehall's wartime efforts to fathom the mind of Hitler.

Dr Winter is especially well placed to guide his readers through this remarkable Joint Intelligence Committee document. It will fascinate anyone with an appetite for intelligence history or possessing a curiosity about the course of the Second World War.

Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield, FBA,  
Attlee Professor of Contemporary British History,  
Queen Mary, University of London.





# *Introduction*

## **I. Historical context**

Referred to erroneously in several historical accounts as ‘Why the Germans Lost’,<sup>1</sup> *Some Weaknesses in German Strategy and Organisation, 1933–1945* has never before been published or quoted in its entirety.<sup>2</sup> Held under Section 3 (4) of the Public Records Act for almost half a century, *Some Weaknesses* was finally declassified in October 1991 and released the same year into the protective custody of the old Public Record Office (PRO), Kew under catalogue heading CAB 146/497. Just one of many intelligence-related documents to be liberated by the ‘Waldegrave Initiative’ of 1992, which facilitated the declassification of hitherto highly sensitive government files, *Some Weaknesses* runs to 200 pages and addresses the underlying reasons why Adolf Hitler and the German high command lost the Second World War. These ranged from the peculiar idiosyncrasies of Hitler’s personality, and their negative impact on German strategy, to the failures and weaknesses of the German Intelligence Services (GIS). Yet before consulting the document itself, certain pertinent questions need to be posed such as when and why it was written? Who penned it and for whom?

Begun in March 1945, in response to the growing weight of captured documentation and prisoner-of-war interrogations facilitated by the collapse of the Third Reich, a ‘preliminary draft’ of the report was completed in October 1945 by members of the Joint Intelligence Staff (JIS). Formed in May 1941 to act as a central assessment staff to the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), or as one former chairman has referred to it, the ‘high table’ of British intelligence, the *raison d’être* of the JIS was to co-ordinate, assess and disseminate strategic intelligence for the JIC in considered inter-service appreciations. This was essential work inasmuch as the JIC, created in June 1936 to act as single voice on security and intelligence matters,<sup>3</sup> and whose membership from May 1940

onwards comprised the heads of the main constituent departments of Britain's intelligence community, reported directly to the British Chiefs of Staff (CoS) and in turn the Prime Minister on all matters regarding the secret world.<sup>4</sup>

Yet notably, if rough drafts of the report, which are held within file CAB 146/498 and entitled 'MI14 Draft for JIC', are consulted, it becomes apparent that virtually all the intellectual preparation for JIC (46) 33 (Final), as *Some Weaknesses* was to be referred to bureaucratically, was conducted by officers from MI14, the War Office's German Section.<sup>5</sup> Established on 15 May 1940,<sup>6</sup> and tasked with handling all intelligence pertaining to the German war machine, MI14 would eventually consist of eleven sub-sections ranging from MI14(a) to MI14(k), which handled everything from the German Army's order of battle to the *dramatis personae* of the *Wehrmacht*'s high command. Yet its real purpose, according to Noel Annan, who served in both MI14 and the JIS during the war, was not only to 'advise the Chief of the Imperial General Staff [as to] what Hitler would do next',<sup>7</sup> but to act as a form of 'lightning conductor, giving the Director of Military Intelligence and the CIGS some protection from Churchill's erratic interpretations' of secret intelligence.<sup>8</sup>

Aside from exposing the inexplicable decision on the part of the JIC to conceal the involvement of MI14 in the project, and instead to credit the JIS with the authorship of *Some Weaknesses*, the contents of 'MI14 Draft for JIC' also serve to shed some light upon those figures intimately involved in its drafting. This is fortunate in that the few existing accounts which do allude to the report, namely Donald McLachlan's *Room 39* and Sir Percy Cradock's *Know Your Enemy*, fail to enlighten readers as to the identities or positions of those engaged in its compilation. Yet by means of scribbled notes and memoranda preserved within the covers of CAB 146/498, we now know that a Major O'Donovan of MI14 and a M. J. Creswell, Foreign Office representative to the JIC and signatory to the final report, were the true architects of the project, instrumental in managing the commission and ensuring its successful completion.

Eventually submitted by the JIC to the Chiefs of Staff on 20 October 1946 as a 'leaving present to its masters', *Some Weaknesses*, which was 'orientated from the German point of view', sought to act as a 'check', so its preface avowed, on the accuracy and validity of JIC papers submitted to the heads of Britain's

armed forces throughout the war. Subordinate to this, but nevertheless just as important, was the need to educate British officialdom as to the 'principal causes of German collapse, inherent in Germany's political and military organisation, in German personalities and in Germany's war machine and methods of production'. Amounting to what would now be termed a 'mission statement', the JIS declared in the report's foreword:

We consider it desirable to set down certain aspects of the War whilst there are still sources available who were closely connected with the events described. We believe that when it is finally possible to make a balanced historical survey, some of the acutely critical moments which are vividly remembered now are likely to become confused with the passage of time, and that there will be a tendency to take for granted Allied superiority and to underestimate the great and evident strength of the German war machine.<sup>9</sup>

Yet 50 years later a leading historian, Professor Richard Overy, published a book, which, retrospectively, confirmed their original fears. Entitled *Why the Allies Won*,<sup>10</sup> this tome not only exhibited a 'tendency to take Allied superiority for granted' but also 'underestimated' the German war machine and in particular its supreme commander, Adolf Hitler. As well as being diametrically opposed to the less-attractive proposition 'Why the Germans Lost', held by some wartime intelligence figures as being closer to the truth,<sup>11</sup> *Why the Allies Won* also eschewed addressing the vitally important issue of intelligence and its impact on the course of the war.

Ignoring the verdict reached by the official historian of wartime British intelligence, Sir Harry Hinsley, namely that the war had been shortened by at least one or two years due to the miracles of ULTRA, the product of Bletchley Park's decryption of German high-grade codes,<sup>12</sup> Overy stated in his preface that, 'It is fashionable to see the use of intelligence as a critical difference between the two sides, but I am not sufficiently persuaded of this to give the subject a chapter of its own'.<sup>13</sup> For the eminent 'warrior-scholar', Professor Sir Michael Howard, author of the official history of British wartime deception, 'to write the history of the war without mentioning it [intelligence] was like writing *Hamlet* without the Ghost'.<sup>14</sup> That

Overy was so dismissive of 'intelligence' and its influence on Allied operations and strategy is not only startling, but highly questionable in the light of over three decades' worth of research on the subject. Such indifference is even more puzzling when one considers the critical role played by intelligence, as evidenced in *Some Weaknesses*, in the rise, decline and fall of the Allies' opposite numbers in Berlin.

## II. Contents

In terms of structure and content, this official *aide mémoire* is organized into three main sections each containing distinct sub-sections. The first addresses Hitler's 'grand design' for the domination of Europe and the world by Nazi Germany; the major events which interfered with his plans, such as the declaration of war by Great Britain in September 1939; the inability of the *Luftwaffe* to win air superiority over England during the summer of 1940 thereby forcing the cancellation of Operation *Sealion*, the proposed invasion of Britain; the failure of Operation *Barbarossa*, the German offensive against the Soviet Union in June 1941; and the entry into the war of the United States in December 1941. Section I also chronicles the slow but inexorable defeat of the Nazi war machine from 1942 onwards after it lost the strategic initiative to the Allies. Section II, meanwhile, focuses on the inherent weaknesses of Germany's war effort, which were recorded as Hitler's idiosyncratic style of command, the absence of a joint command structure within the *Wehrmacht*, the flawed nature of the German Intelligence Services, and the organization of German war production, which up to 1943 was simply not geared to waging 'Total War'.

The last section, which consists of 19 appendices, 'describes', in the words of the report's authors, 'the chronological sequence of events from 1939 onwards in the different theatres of war, on land, on sea and in the air, and in the fields of war production and military supply'.<sup>15</sup> This approach, so the report claimed, was 'in order to illustrate the manner in which the various German weaknesses played their part in Germany's defeat'.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, for those whose pulses do not race at the thought of Nazi economics and industrial output, two

of the most fascinating and engaging chapters to be found in *Some Weaknesses* are those devoted to the mental peculiarities of the Führer and the activities of his principal espionage agencies, namely the *Abwehr*, the German Military Intelligence section of the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (OKW),<sup>17</sup> and the *Sicherheitsdienst* (SD), the intelligence service of Heinrich Himmler's *Schutzstaffel* or SS.

## *Der Führer*

The quest to fathom the Führer, however, was not the sole preserve of Whitehall's central intelligence machine. At almost the same time as MI14 and the JIC were embarking upon their own intellectual journey, the future Regius Professor of Modern History at Oxford, Hugh Trevor-Roper, who had served within the ranks of the wartime Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), was compiling his own unique insight into the Nazi dictator's character and mental universe. Commissioned in September 1945 by the MI5 officer Brigadier Dick White<sup>18</sup> to investigate the exact circumstances surrounding the fate of Adolf Hitler and his Nazi 'court', Trevor-Roper's tireless enquiries and final counter-intelligence report, which he submitted to his superiors at the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) in November 1945, would come to represent the basis for a best-selling book, *The Last Days of Hitler*.<sup>19</sup>

Remarkably, 60 years on, and in its ninth edition, *The Last Days of Hitler*, first published in March 1947, was, in the opinion of Noel Annan, 'an account that still stands despite the mountains of material that later became available'.<sup>20</sup> Later feted by the media as *the* 'Hitler expert', and regarded in the immediate post-war period by the Foreign Office's Information Research Department (IRD), dealing with psychological warfare, as the 'principal student of German mentality under war conditions',<sup>21</sup> Trevor-Roper had, by means of his treatise, initiated a literary process, which to date has produced countless books and articles on Hitler and the Third Reich.

In keeping with the overall conclusions reached by Trevor-Roper in 1945, it is generally agreed by historians that Adolf Hitler was responsible not only for starting the Second World War in 1939 but perpetuating it well into 1945. His importance and centrality to the story of the war are now beyond doubt. In the

opinion of one distinguished academic, the 'Second World War' was, first and foremost, 'Hitler's personal war in many senses. He intended it, he prepared for it, he chose the moment for launching it; and for three years, in the main, he planned its course'.<sup>22</sup> Such a contention is also championed by the multi-volume German official history, *Germany and the Second World War*, which has not only reasoned that, 'The European war that broke out on 1 September 1939 would not have done so but for Hitler',<sup>23</sup> but has also contended that once the war became a truly global conflict in 1941 involving, as it did, ideologically driven totalitarian states, Hitler became in effect 'the totally dominant figure of this ideologized warfare'.<sup>24</sup>

Yet astonishingly, Britain's wartime central intelligence machine failed consistently to acknowledge the Führer's supremacy in politico-military affairs. Only in *Some Weaknesses* did the JIS and JIC finally recognize this, albeit far too late to affect the accuracy of their wartime reporting to Churchill and the Chiefs of Staff. Further issues on which the apex of British intelligence failed to report during the war, but deemed important enough to include in its farewell paper, are Hitler's personality and cognitive processes, as well as his mental and physical health.

During the period March 1945 to October 1946, the JIS had come to discern several 'defects' in Hitler's character which, they claimed, had had a ruinous effect upon Germany's ability to execute a successful war. His so-called intuition, 'obstinacy', failure to 'appreciate the opinions and reactions of Foreign Countries', 'opportunism', 'over-centralization and obsession with detail' were all cited.<sup>25</sup> Yet thanks to 60 years' worth of academic study devoted to this topic, several other idiosyncrasies and personality traits can be added to this list, namely the exhibition of a volatile mix of ethnocentric biases, ideological and racist prejudices, secretiveness, fanaticism, megalomania, paranoia and obsession. What is more, we now know that these facets of Hitler's mental make-up were accentuated by serious physical health problems precipitated in part by an over-reliance upon drugs and an injurious lifestyle.<sup>26</sup>

Crucially, the JIS were in no doubt that the 'main defects of Hitler's character' had indeed had an 'important influence on the way in which Germany waged the war'<sup>27</sup> and that the 'cumulative effect of these defects . . . eventually made a very great contribution to the breakdown of the whole German

war machine.<sup>28</sup> That the JIS should have devoted a whole chapter in *Some Weaknesses* to Hitler's personality and its impact upon German strategy, however, is somewhat surprising in light of recent research among the surviving records of the wartime JIC. This has revealed that the committee and its assessment staff failed largely to place Hitler in his proper context and to ascertain exactly where he stood in relation to the conception, planning and direction of German strategy and operations. To compound matters, the JIC and JIS assumed, quite falsely, that the OKH and OKW were in reality devising strategy while acting at the same time as a brake on Hitler's more questionable actions.<sup>29</sup>

Tellingly, as much was admitted to in 1946 by the report's authors. Having acknowledged, *ex post facto*, that no other figure in Germany had exerted the same degree of 'major influence on German strategy or foreign policy' as had the Führer – a fact attributed to his having 'remained the dictator and undisputed ruler of National Socialist Germany right up to a few days before his death' – they conceded that, 'This was much more so than was often assumed by Allied assessments made during the war'.<sup>30</sup> What is more, the JIS was also at pains to point out that contrary to what the JIC had conjectured at the time, 'Even the most powerful of his subordinates acted only by Hitler's grace', and that, 'Many of the policies attributed to Himmler, Goebbels or Ribbentrop [actually] originated from Hitler himself'.<sup>31</sup>

As for the mind-set and psychology of the Nazi leader, the paucity of war-time intelligence on these matters is evidenced in the post-war findings of the JIS, who, when pressed to pass judgement confessed: 'We lack the evidence on which to attempt an analysis of Hitler's mental processes; it is, indeed, open to doubt whether a satisfactory judgment on this difficult topic will ever be reached' they concluded.<sup>32</sup> Difficult or not, Britain's secret state never stood a chance in second-guessing the Führer's thought-processes due to the simple fact that throughout the war they eschewed the psychological profiling of foreign leaders.

This was, however, in stark contrast to US intelligence, and in particular the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the American equivalent of Britain's SIS, who during the spring of 1943 embarked up two audacious and comprehensive psychological studies of Adolf Hitler: 'Analysis of the



Personality of Adolph Hitler With Predictions of His Future Behaviour and Suggestions for Dealing with Him Now and After Germany's Surrender' by Dr Henry A. Murray;<sup>33</sup> and Dr Walter C. Langer's, 'A Psychological Analysis of Adolph Hitler: His Life and Legend'.<sup>34</sup> Unlike JIC assessments, these evaluations attempted to identify, *inter alia*, a direct correlation between Hitler's personality and his actions in the hope of predicting his future intentions *vis-à-vis* the Allies. Overall, these two reports were, in the opinion of one author, 'remarkably accurate in some respects',<sup>35</sup> giving US intelligence at least some clue as to what made their adversary 'tick'.

### *Hitler's mental and physical health*

Since his suicide in April 1945, the state of Hitler's physical and mental health has been a subject of prolonged debate by historians. Numerous books have been devoted to this subject, but perhaps the most successful has been Fritz Redlich's 'pathography' of the Nazi leader, *Hitler: Diagnosis of a Destructive Prophet*,<sup>36</sup> which posed the key question: could 'physical illness or mental disorder ... contribute to an understanding of [the Nazi leader's] behaviour'?<sup>37</sup>

Unlike his British counter-part, Winston Churchill, Hitler did not possess a figure equivalent to that of Lord Moran, who, as Churchill's personal doctor, helped nurse the ageing leader through his finest hour.<sup>38</sup> Instead, the Nazi leader placed himself at the mercy of a quack and charlatan, namely Dr Theodor Morell, who from 1936 onwards was Hitler's personal physician.<sup>39</sup> Churchill's drinking habits have on occasions been seized upon by some historians to explain some of the wartime Premier's more erratic behaviour and strategic ideas. Yet, as the great man once quipped, 'I have taken more out of alcohol than alcohol has taken out of me'.<sup>40</sup> The same, however, could not be said of Adolf Hitler and his dependency on narcotic stimulants.

The dictator's reliance upon Morell and the drugs he administered was a direct result of his own mental and physical disorders, which grew in severity as Germany's war unfolded. In August 1941 electrocardiograms indicated that Hitler had become afflicted by 'rapidly progressive coronary sclerosis',<sup>41</sup> which in conjunction with gastrointestinal problems, insomnia, depression and a general malaise, heralded the beginning of deteriorating health for the Führer.

However, the most serious signs of ill-health began to display themselves in 1942 when Hitler started to exhibit 'an uncontrollable trembling of the left arm, jerking in his left leg, and a shuffling gait . . .',<sup>42</sup> unmistakable indications of Parkinson's disease.

To offset the debilitating effects of these maladies, Morell subjected the Nazi leader to a regime of pills and injections. One historian has calculated that Morell administered 90 varieties of pills and injections during the war, with Hitler taking up to 28 different types of tablets each day.<sup>43</sup> Significantly, this medication took the form of amphetamines, opiates, bromides, barbiturates and cocaine, a chemical cocktail made more potent by the introduction of 'large doses of Dexedrine . . . caffeine . . . and huge quantities of Dr Koester's Anti-Gas Pills, which contained small doses of the poison Strychnine and atropine'.<sup>44</sup> Yet, despite the mind-blowing strength of such drugs, there is a general consensus that, with the exception of amphetamines, Hitler never succumbed to the addictive qualities of these pills.

It was, however, the abuse of amphetamines which appears to have had the most deleterious effect upon Hitler's physical and cognitive processes. This substance abuse, as noted by one commentator, took place between 1939 and 1943, a period in which the dictator took some of his most important strategic decisions, and resulted in the Führer being at times 'temporarily impaired'.<sup>45</sup> This was perhaps unsurprising when one acknowledges the severe side-effects of prolonged amphetamine abuse, specifically: 'increased anger and anxiety', hallucinations, paranoid delusions, 'schizophrenia-like psychotic episodes with dangerously violent behaviour', elevated blood pressure, chest pains and convulsions.<sup>46</sup> Despite inexplicably discontinuing its use during the last two years of war, 'Could some of Hitler's major tactical or strategic errors, such as impulsive military decisions, or enormous, multi-casual decisions such as declaration of war, be ascribed to amphetamine abuse?'<sup>47</sup> Redlich demurs maintaining rather equivocally that the 'Existing evidence does not permit this conclusion beyond any reasonable doubt'.<sup>48</sup>

In terms of Hitler's mental health there has been much debate as to whether or not he was a psychotic, a schizophrenic or just plain 'mad'. For Dr David Owen, author of *In Sickness and in Power*, 'The popular assumption of . . . Hitler's madness rests in part on the enormity of his crimes but also, perhaps, on his style,

or at least on his rhetorical style . . .<sup>49</sup> Yet, as Owen himself has stated, 'There is no convincing evidence that makes it possible for Hitler to be categorized as mentally ill . . .'<sup>50</sup> This diagnosis is also supported by the exhaustive researches of Fritz Redlich, who has concluded that although the Führer did not suffer from 'any of the major psychotic disorders' such as schizophrenia or psychoses, he may well have been encumbered by an 'anti-social personality disorder and borderline personality disorder'.<sup>51</sup> Clearly, Hitler's crimes and strategic misjudgements cannot be attributed to insanity or mental illness. However, could errors in judgement and decision-making on the part of the Führer be ascribed to physical ill-health and to the malign effects of drug abuse?

The consensus among most historians is a categorical 'no'. John Lukacs, author of *The Hitler of History*, has avowed: 'there is absolutely no convincing evidence to the effect that his physical ailments affected or obscured his thinking and his judgment to the point of irrationality';<sup>52</sup> while the distinguished writer, Sebastian Haffner, asserted: 'Accounts presenting Hitler during the final years of the war as a mere shadow of himself, a pitiable human wreck, are all hopelessly overdrawn. Hitler's disastrous failures from 1941 to 1945 . . . cannot be explained by physical or mental decline'.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, Ian Kershaw is adamant that, 'Morell and his medicines were neither a major nor even a minor part of the explanation of Germany's plight . . .'<sup>54</sup> during the latter stages of the war. Not even the degenerative nature of Parkinson's disease has been afforded a role in explaining away Hitler's highly-questionable politico-military choices. For one leading medical practitioner, 'his capacity for problem-solving and information processing was not impaired'<sup>55</sup> by the disease, nor did it, in Owen's opinion, ' . . . much affect his key decision-making', which was already 'fixed by his own overambitious strategic objectives'.<sup>56</sup>

What is indisputable, however, was the 'extremely rapid bodily and mental decline' Hitler suffered between 1942 and 1945.<sup>57</sup> This was attested to by two of the Führer's closest subordinates, his SS Adjutant, Otto Günsche, and Heniz Linge, his personal valet. Under severe torture and interrogation by their Soviet captors, the two admitted that as the war progressed the dictator had suffered more and more dizzy spells and illnesses,<sup>58</sup> adding that by 1944 Hitler simply 'could not live without the stimulants and tranquillisers' Morell prescribed.<sup>59</sup> It would appear that during their lengthy interrogations, Günsche

and Linge supplied their NKVD inquisitors with plentiful evidence of 'Hitler's mental absence, even disorientation, and of his complete indifference to his surroundings'.<sup>60</sup>

This overall impression of physical and psychological decrepitude is supported by *Oberst* Bernd Freytag von Loringhoven, *aide-de-camp* to Hitler's last two chiefs of staff, who, 60 years after the war, recollected that by 1944 and 'At fifty-five years old, he [Hitler] truly looked an old man, stooping, hunched, head drooping, skin greyish, face deathly pale, eyes lacklustre . . .'.<sup>61</sup> As it was, Hitler's health and Germany's military fortunes mirrored one another, deteriorating steadily throughout the winter of 1944–45 and eventually expiring that following spring.

Yet, despite the claims of historians and commentators such as Kershaw, Lukacs and Redlich, namely that Hitler's physiological and psychological condition would not have seriously impaired his judgement, or ability to take rational decisions (conclusions which may well derive from a reluctance to hand the Führer's supporters an apologia for his heinous crimes and actions), it is very doubtful whether any human being could function properly in a state of such mental and physical decay. Furthermore, the mixture and quantity of drugs taken by Hitler, particularly from 1941 onwards, also pose further valid questions as to his fitness for command and his capacity to conceive, plan and direct strategy.

Aside from the abundance of material made available to Whitehall by the collapse of the Third Reich, the state of the Führer's physical and mental health, as already noted, went largely unreported by the highest forum of Britain's intelligence community. The extant records of the JIC show that neither the committee nor its assessment staff took this subject seriously, despite the existence of credible evidence in other department's files, subsequently omitting this potentially significant subject from their appreciations. In doing so, they failed to draw the attention of the Chiefs of Staff to a potential correlation between Hitler's deteriorating mental and physical health and the course of German strategy, which became ever more erratic and illogical as the war progressed. Only in *Some Weaknesses* did the JIC finally acknowledge the relevance of this issue, notifying its readership that although the Führer had, 'offset his mental and physical exhaustion by means of artificial stimulants', by war's end these

short-term solutions had merely 'increased his incapacity to take decisions, which he put off from day to day even when every hour was vital'.<sup>62</sup>

### *Failures and weaknesses of the German Intelligence Services*

Despite the protestations of some historians to the contrary, any explanation as to why Hitler and his generals ultimately lost the war is simply incomplete without reference to the role of intelligence in both the Allied and Nazi camps. At least in respect of Hitler's intelligence machine, the JIC's farewell paper does not disappoint, devoting one chapter (Chapter III of Section II 'The Weakness of German Intelligence') and an appendix (Appendix V the 'German Secret Intelligence Service (G.S.I.S.)') to Nazi Germany's covert agencies. Prominent among these, as the report makes clear, were the *Abwehr* and *Sicherheitsdienst* both of which were instrumental in helping to undermine the Third Reich, albeit for diametrically opposing reasons.

Established in 1921 as the 'only form of intelligence department permitted to Germany by the Versailles Treaty'<sup>63</sup> and headed from 1935 onwards by the *éminence grise* of German Intelligence, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, the *Abwehr* was, in essence, the secret service of the OKW. Tasked primarily with the acquisition of military intelligence, the *Abwehr* in fact consisted of three main sections, I, II and III, dealing with foreign intelligence gathering, sabotage and covert operations and security and counter-espionage respectively.<sup>64</sup> Each of these 'specialist' sections were represented within a 'network of stations inside and outside the Reich': those inside the 'Reich and German-occupied territories' were designated *Abwehrstellen* (Ast); while those in neutral states, such as Sweden, Turkey and Spain, were referred to as *Kriegsorganisationen* (KOs).<sup>65</sup> Despite the existence of Section VI of the SD, which also specialized in foreign intelligence, Canaris's organization managed to achieve primacy in this particular arena of espionage. This was due in no small part to the abilities of Canaris and the fact that the *Abwehr* was held in such high esteem by Hitler who, for many years, was in awe of its cloak-and-dagger activities.

Yet the collective wisdom of the JIC, as distilled within the pages of *Some Weaknesses*, maintained that the standing and success of Canaris's organization

had peaked during the years 1939–41. This was due largely to the successes of the German Army in the field, which ironically owed little to intelligence, and the effectiveness of *Abwehr* counter-espionage operations against foreign agents in Western Europe, which most certainly did. The JIC argued, moreover, that this ‘golden period’ for the *Abwehr* had given way during the years 1942–44 to one of almost ‘uniform failure’ inasmuch as the German secret service signally failed to acquire crucial intelligence on Allied strategic and operational intentions prior to the amphibious landings in North Africa, Sicily, Italy and Normandy.

The fate of the *Abwehr* was finally sealed, however, in February 1944 when Canaris was relieved of his command ostensibly for not countering Allied intelligence operations in Spain. The situation was compounded still further by the defection to the Allies of the *Abwehr* official Erich Vermehren and his wife that very month. Led by *Oberst* Georg Hansen from March onwards, Canaris’s beloved service would eventually become entirely subsumed within the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (RSHA) for its role in the Bomb Plot of 20 July 1944 when disaffected *Wehrmacht* officers attempted to assassinate Hitler and trigger a *coup d’état* against the Nazi regime.<sup>66</sup>

It is on the question of its failures and weaknesses as a covert intelligence gathering and analytical service that the report excels. Drawing heavily, one detects, upon the Top Secret report compiled on the *Abwehr* and SD by Hugh Trevor-Roper in 1945,<sup>67</sup> *Some Weaknesses* enumerates the inherent flaws of Hitler’s intelligence machinery and the suspect methodology employed by his spies. These ranged from their inability to ‘speak truth unto power’ inasmuch as their intelligence had to be skewered to fit with the particular preconceptions and *Weltanschauung* (‘world view’) of Hitler and his henchmen; through ‘the absence of any inter-service staff’, such as the JIC and JIS, for the ‘co-ordination and appreciation of intelligence’;<sup>68</sup> to the marked disinclination of the various German Intelligence Services to co-operate and co-ordinate with one another, which was symptomatic of the ‘divide and rule’ policy so actively encouraged by the Führer. To round matters off, the report’s authors also alluded to the fact that the *Abwehr*, in particular, was ‘idle and corrupt’ and rife with ‘financial corruption and political disaffection’.<sup>69</sup> There is no doubt, therefore, that these

serious defects in Nazi intelligence contributed significantly to the defeat of Hitler and his Third Reich.

Nevertheless, the wartime record of the *Abwehr*, SD, *Gestapo* and RSHA as a whole was not all bad. Fashionable as it has become to dismiss and ridicule Hitler's spies, *Some Weaknesses* makes clear that these organizations did in fact achieve notable wartime successes against the Allies. Perhaps their most significant success was in penetrating the various agent networks set-up and run by the Special Operations Executive (SOE) and SIS in the Low Countries. In particular, *der Englandspiel*, or the 'England Game', whereby British agents dropped into Holland during the period 1942–44 were captured and 'played back' to their handlers in London, came to exemplify the ruthless efficiency of the German Intelligence Services and the skill with which they operated against their British adversaries.<sup>70</sup>

The kidnapping of two SIS officers, Major Richard Stevens and Captain Sigismund Payne Best, by the SD at the Dutch-German frontier town of Venlo on 9 November 1939, was an even earlier success for Nazi intelligence. Lured to this unremarkable town by supposed representatives of the German military opposition to Hitler, Stevens and Best unfortunately fell into a carefully laid trap set by the leading SD officer, SS *Brigadeführer* Walther Schellenberg. Spirited across the German border by their SS abductors, the two intelligence officers would reveal much under interrogation about SIS, its staff and organization thereby fatally weakening its operations in the Low Countries.<sup>71</sup>

Further successes acknowledged by *Some Weaknesses* focus on the ability of the RSHA not only to penetrate Allied and neutral embassies, but to undertake 'spectacular sabotage and terrorist activities' against its enemies, many being organized by the legendary SS *Obersturmbannführer* Otto Skorzeny; the accumulation of vital information by the *Gestapo* on Soviet military potential during the period 1939 to 1941 through the detailed questioning of German workers and technicians returning from the Soviet Union; the formidable success of the *Gestapo* in counter-intelligence and the repression of conspiracy and unrest in Germany and occupied Europe; and finally its deep penetration of French resistance networks in the run-up to the D-Day landings of June 1944, which resulted in its detecting the imminence of the Allied offensive before its rivals in the *Abwehr* and SD. Missing from *Some Weaknesses*, however, are

some of the other major successes achieved by the *Abwehr*, specifically the early penetration of MI5,<sup>72</sup> the acquisition of the blueprints for the top-secret US 'Norden' bombsight and the setting up of extensive agent networks in the Soviet Union and the United States.<sup>73</sup> In light of these achievements, it is clear that Canaris's agents were not all 'idle and corrupt' incompetents.

### III. Omissions in the report

Significantly, what is not mentioned in the report is just as fascinating and important as what is. To those conscious of the crucial role intelligence played helping Britain and her Allies win the war, the conspicuous absence of any reference in *Some Weaknesses* to signals intelligence (SIGINT), and in particular ULTRA is arresting. The same applies to strategic deception, which reached new heights of ingenuity and success due to the work of the Double-Cross or XX Committee, which from January 1941 until the end of the war ran an exotic cast of double agents, mostly *Abwehr* spies sent to Britain, captured and eventually 'turned' by the Security Service, MI5. Also omitted is the role of human intelligence (HUMINT), the work of spies and in particular the activities of deep penetration agents situated in the very heart of Hitler's high command.<sup>74</sup> The subversive activities of key figures within the ranks of the Third Reich, who actively conspired against it, are also airbrushed from history by the report's draftsmen.

#### *Spies and 'Traitors'*

Startlingly, recent archival research has revealed that British intelligence possessed at least three 'moles' within the OKW and RSHA. From early 1940 until September 1942 SIS ran a high-level asset inside the supreme command of the *Wehrmacht*. Codenamed 'Warlock' this agent fed his handlers valuable information on the strategic and operational intentions of the German military machine. By early 1941, however, it had become apparent to certain sections of Whitehall's intelligence community, namely MI14 and the JIS, that 'Warlock' had been caught and 'turned' by Himmler's security services. This dawning realization stemmed from the fact that the material supplied by 'Warlock'



did not tally with the intelligence they were acquiring via ULTRA and other secret sources. A pattern of discrepancies or contradictions in such information would have alerted British intelligence officers to such a scenario. Yet why SIS continued to believe in their much-prized agent far into 1942, when sister organizations were preaching extreme caution, remains a mystery.<sup>75</sup>

A further cast of top-level agents discovered in the files of British intelligence appear to have infiltrated the very highest echelons of the German high command and its intelligence apparatus. Despite not having a codename we now know through a declassified CX report that SIS possessed an asset with very close connections to the RSHA and Walther Schellenberg himself.<sup>76</sup> Confirmed by material located in the records of the American Office for Strategic Services (OSS),<sup>77</sup> it would appear that as late as February 1945 this particular spy was relaying back to London critical information on the activities, personalities and rivalries of Hitler's security agencies. Frustratingly, the identity of this agent remains a mystery, but deep suspicion falls upon Kurt Jahnke, an officer in Amt VI, the foreign intelligence branch of the RSHA, who was a trusted confidant of Schellenberg's.<sup>78</sup>

Perhaps one of the greatest sources of wartime HUMINT, however, was agent 'Knopf'. Run by the Polish Secret Service (II Bureau of the Polish general staff), from at least early 1941 until late 1943, 'Knopf' was a German national, possibly a staff officer, whose sub-sources in the OKW and OKH provided him with top-grade strategic and operational intelligence on the *Wehrmacht* during some of the most critical stages of the war. Passed on to SIS by the Poles, who cultivated a very close wartime relationship with their British counterparts, the material collected by 'Knopf' and his sources ranged from the actual date of Hitler's offensive against the Soviet Union, Operation *Barbarossa*, to the existence of the Führer's headquarters in East Prussia, the *Wolfsschanze* (Wolf's Lair). Further intelligence on German intentions in North Africa, the Mediterranean and on the Eastern Front was also forwarded to Whitehall by this remarkable network. So highly was 'Knopf's' product regarded that it was disseminated to and read by General Sir Alan Brooke, Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS) and Winston Churchill himself.<sup>79</sup>

Two of the most noteworthy 'traitors' to Hitler, who actively sought to undermine the Third Reich from within, were Admiral Wilhelm Canaris and

his deputy, Colonel Hans Oster. Known as the 'little admiral', Canaris was an ardent anti-Nazi who had, since the late 1930s, conspired with other disaffected German officers to topple the Nazi dictator and his regime. Much ink has been spilled over the years by historians in their quest to ascertain the exact nature of Canaris's 'treason'. To varying degrees, all have muddied the waters. Yet we now know that despite distancing himself from the July Bomb Plot conspirators, who formed the nucleus of the German Opposition to Hitler, the chief of the *Abwehr* did pass on valuable intelligence to SIS.

This is confirmed in the Service's recent official history which relates that Canaris, known as 'Theodor' to the British, drip-fed politico-military secrets to a Polish intelligence agent, Halina Szymańska, codenamed 'Z.5/I', who worked ostensibly as a secretary in the Polish legation in Berne, Switzerland. This secret back-channel was via an *Abwehr* subordinate, Hans-Bernd Gisevius, who from August 1940 until December 1942 supplied Szymańska, and in turn, Whitehall's secret servants, with a variety of classified material. So close was the relationship between Canaris and Szymańska (the two had first met in Poland in September 1939) that on one occasion in October 1941, Hitler's spymaster even had dinner with her in Berne in order to reveal the extent of German difficulties on the Eastern Front.<sup>80</sup> Ironically, Canaris was later hanged by the Nazis not, it must be noted, for leaking secrets to the enemy, but for his association with leading anti-Nazis.

No less important, however, were the activities of Hans Oster. Outspoken, reckless and overtly anti-Nazi, Oster was almost the mirror-opposite of his more calculating boss. Appalled by the excesses of the Nazis and convinced that Germany would lose the war Hitler had initiated, Oster sought to undermine the Third Reich by leaking to the Allies the military plans of the German high Command. The high-water mark of his espionage activities occurred in the autumn and spring of 1939–40 just as the *Wehrmacht* was poised to invade in the West. Determined to fatally compromise the planned German offensive, the deputy head of the *Abwehr* re-activated an old friendship with the Dutch Military Attaché in Berlin, Major Gijsbertus Jacobus Sas, in order to betray Hitler's aggressive intentions. Details of 'Case Yellow', the blueprint for the invasion of France and the Low Countries, were personally communicated to Sas by Oster, who encouraged his friend to disseminate them to

his counter-parts in Belgian and British intelligence. Frustratingly, like earlier failed attempts to alert the Danes and Norwegians of impending attack, Oster's warnings were ignored, dismissed or acted upon half-heartedly by the Dutch, Belgians and British with tragic consequences.<sup>81</sup>

Let down by the Allies, Oster committed himself thereafter to the overthrow of the Nazi regime by means of a *coup d'état*. A one-man dynamo, Oster would work tirelessly during the next three years to galvanize a cabal of disaffected *Wehrmacht* officers who shared his ultimate goal: the elimination of Hitler. Yet his personal crusade was jeopardized in April 1943 when he was dismissed from his post as *Abwehr* deputy for helping Jews evade their Nazi persecutors. This, coupled with the dismissal of Canaris in February 1944, ensured that the *Abwehr* was no longer the epicentre of the German Opposition. Yet on 20 July 1944 their co-conspirators very nearly succeeded in killing the Führer and triggering a military coup in Berlin. Tragically, Hitler survived and the subsequent man-hunt by Himmler's security services ensured that many of those implicated, including Oster, were arrested by the *Gestapo* and duly executed or imprisoned. For his 'crimes' against the Reich, Oster was hanged, along with his old boss Canaris, on 9 April 1945 at Flossenburg concentration camp.

Unsurprisingly, none of the incredible facts cited above are recorded or even hinted at within the covers of *Some Weaknesses*. The reason for such omissions is, however, rather prosaic. Quite simply, the remit of *Some Weaknesses*, as set down by the relevant commissioning authorities, never allowed for the report's scribes to disclose the critical role SIGINT, HUMINT and the Double-Cross system played in defeating Hitler's war machine. Such matters were far too sensitive and secret to divulge to a wider, uninitiated audience. The wartime policy of 'need to know' remained, un-astonishingly, paramount throughout. Consequently, the report received a very low security classification from Whitehall's secret servants, namely 'confidential' as opposed to 'Secret' or 'Top Secret'. Frozen by official secrecy for the next 30 years, it was not until 1974, when Group Captain Frederick Winterbotham published his book, *The Ultra Secret*, that the work of Bletchley Park was revealed to the general public.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, it has taken even longer for Britain's foreign

intelligence gathering service, SIS, to avow officially its wartime agent networks and clandestine operations.<sup>83</sup>

### *Nazi atomic and chemical weapons programmes*

What is also absent from this account is any reference to the German's atomic weapon programme, informally known as the *Uranverein* or the 'Uranium Club' which commenced work shortly before the outbreak of war. One of the project's leading scientists, the German physicist Werner Heisenberg, was instrumental in harnessing the research and development facilities of the Third Reich in order to investigate the feasibility of building an atomic bomb. Yet Heisenberg's work, and indeed that of the entire programme, was gravely undermined by Hitler's racial laws and the politicization of academia, which forced some of the world's greatest physicists, many of whom were Jewish, to leave Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy and head to the safety of the United States. By means of this 'brain drain' the Nazis fatally crippled their own programme and endowed their current and future enemies with the requisite mental horsepower required to win the race for nuclear supremacy. The failure of the Third Reich to attain the atom bomb, therefore, must surely rank among one of the most important reasons why Hitler did not win the Second World War, or at the very least reach a politico-military stalemate *vis-à-vis* the Allied powers.

*Some Weaknesses* is also silent about those atomic programmes run by Britain, Canada and their American ally, codenamed TUBE ALLOYS and the MANHATTAN Project respectively. Yet this is curious in light of the first successful test of the atom bomb at the Alamogordo test range, New Mexico on 16 July 1945, and is doubly so when considering the obvious publicity surrounding the dropping of the uranium (codenamed 'Little Boy') and plutonium ('Fat Man') atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6 August and 9 August 1945. This deafening silence also conceals the fact that the atomic bomb had originally been intended for use against Nazi Germany. In light of post-war disclosures, it is safe to conclude that had Grand Admiral Karl Doenitz's 'Flensburg government' refused to capitulate in May 1945, thereby prolonging hostilities, the cities of Berlin and Nuremberg would