

# Röhm Continues to Push

BY GEN. LEON DEGRELLE

*Unsatisfied with the Junker-dominated Reichswehr (as the German army was called at the end of World War I), both Adolf Hitler and Ernst Röhm wanted Germany to have a "popular army," wherein all the commanders would be holders of the faith (i.e., National Socialists), and in which every man would be a warrior for a doctrine. That goal would be realized, after years of caution, in the Waffen SS. However, this common goal did nothing to prevent the two German leaders from eventually suffering a fatal collision. Röhm, according to Leon Degrelle, was really the one who provoked that drastic turn of events.*

Hitler would be able to build a true "popular army" only on a very small scale at first, because the Reichswehr, terribly jealous of its monopoly, would set up many obstacles to its recruitment until 1941. In contrast to the recruitment of the throngs of the SA that Röhm, the adventurous latter-day *condottiere*, had swept in after him much too fast and without sufficient control, recruitment to the Waffen SS would be physically, politically and morally the result of a long and rigid selection process. It would be formed of the best built, the most convinced and the most disciplined young men of the Reich, of those with the strongest character, who had a crusader's faith in National Socialism, in Hitler, their leader, in the mission of Teutonism and, after 1940, of the Europe of the 20 comrade peoples who would be found in its ranks. The schools of the Waffen SS for training and for the forming of their cadres would be of a Spartan severity. Discipline was the first of its laws. A Trappist monk did not live more soberly. An officer candidate would sometimes lose a dozen kilograms during his 10 months of instruction.

Thus in 10 years a million young volunteers would be trained in a Spartan manner: volunteers at first from Germany and then from the whole of Europe, all fanatic believers in a revolutionary faith and all builders, as comrades in arms, of a continent that was at last to be one politically, socially, economically, spiritually. Never before had anyone ever seen—nor, beyond doubt, will anyone ever again see—a European army of a million young volunteers inspired by such an ideal, or representing such physical and moral worth.

But that Waffen SS would be the materialization of long years of progressive toil, passing from a battalion to a regiment, then to three divisions not very well armed, then to divisions quite formidably equipped, then to army corps and to armies. Time would permit—as under Napoleon—the selection one by one, for their bravery and for their competence, of thousands of young officers of the very first order. A good many of them for all that were ex-servicemen from 1918, become young again among the young, like the unforgettable Zepp Dietrich, commander-in-chief of the Sixth SS Armored Army; like Gen. Gilles, commander of the glorious Viking; like Félix Steiner, commanding general of the Fourth Armored Corps; or like the grandfather of the Waffen SS, whom everyone affectionately called Papa Hauser.

But the majority, who had come up from the Hitlerjugend (Hitler Youth), or from similar organizations all over Europe, were magnificent young men, like Kurt Meyer, the legendary "Pantermeyer," commander at the age of 34 years of the 18,000 young lads of the Waffen SS Division Hitlerjugend; or like the dazzling Lohengrin, Joaquin Peiper, commander of a tank regiment in the same division at the age of 29.

All of them without distinction had to submit preliminarily to the same iron discipline, and to the same ideological education, earning each of their promotions by their courage in combat and by their decisiveness. I myself, commander at the age of 37 of the Waffen SS division Wallonia, then of the Army Corps Occident, had been a simple soldier on the Russian front for eight months, then corporal, then noncommissioned officer, then second lieutenant, and so on, earning each new rank "for an act of valor in



## Some Germans Fought for the Communists



*Hundreds of Germans fought on the so-called Republican side during the Spanish Civil War, like the soldiers shown here of the Thaelmann Battalion, flying the communist hammer-and-sickle flag. Ernst Thaelmann was the leader of the German Communist Party. He was arrested after the Reichstag fire and sent to Buchenwald, where he eventually died. The battalion fought in some of the war's most vicious actions, defending Madrid against tanks and bombers operated by fellow Germans who were of a fascist bent. Many of these Red soldiers had fled Germany when Hitler took over in 1933.*

combat." That was the hard and fast rule in the Waffen SS.

You went to the Tölz War School only after you had first given repeated proofs of your gift for command in becoming a non-com at the front, and had displayed bravery there by earning the Iron Cross. It was comrades with the souls of leaders and heroes that were placed at the head of the troops and not just those good at schoolwork, who were the usual ones at the old military academies of the past. The soldiers of the Waffen SS also had to be morally men of a high standard. 402,000 of them died in combat. They were the first everywhere, always at the hardest positions. The least fault, in the Waffen SS, was stringently punished. Stealing a knife would get you five months in prison. A Waffen SS man had to be clean and healthy. A revealed homosexual was shot before the entire troop.

Forming an army like that suddenly was not possible. The human material available to Röhm was good for street fighting and for propaganda. But it was worthless for forming a coherent army rapidly and completely, an army modern and exemplary in every way and commanded by leaders of irreproachable moral fiber.

Röhm himself was a pack leader. Incapable of carrying out an arduous mission requiring creativity, at the first test on the border, by some ill-considered and tumultuous action, he would have turned the old Reichswehr into a chaotic army heading ineluctably for disaster. Hitler was farseeing, and he would one day have his "Red Army" thanks to the Waffen SS. But that would come only after years of cleverly sidestepping a thousand traps without falling into one.

Röhm, the mercenary, was too much in a hurry. He was becoming annoyed at the cleverness of the statesman. In 1933 and 1934 his irritation would become progressively more and more fraught with menace. Their differences grew still more serious from the fact that in the socioeconomic sphere, too, Röhm was totally reckless, a revolutionary with an unstable brain.

And there, too, Hitler would be a realist. He had understood perfectly that a synthesis of the economic interests of the Reich could be accomplished only by respecting all the various components of the nation. Capitalism was one of them. Röhm wanted to crush it. Hitler did not. He intended to base his revolution not on a vast social uproar by disorderly masses, but on elites: political elites, social elites, cultural elites, and the elites that constantly renew the industrial world when it is free.

A business leader is the product of a long selection. The rich man's son, if he is intellectually limited, will be a failure in the modern world. Industrialists and economists who can control the development of markets, rationalize production, coordinate their management and labor teams, and open new paths for the production of goods are also elite human beings, their minds always alert, aware of the risks they run but possessing the force of character necessary to surmount them.

Hitler was bent on giving these very different elites a reasoned and sincere social spirit and leading them to an effective conception of society based on a hierarchy of merit. But he had no foolish wish to set off charges of dynamite under employers of



labor and creators of wealth who were as much a part of the working world as a bricklayer or a welder. Persecuting the creators of employment, crushing them under an unjust and irrational state control, economically torpedoing their labors—that would weaken the Reich rather than cure it.

It would also make it impossible to eliminate unemployment. It would end all possibility of strengthening and restoring the Reichswehr, which was still, in 1934, the sole bulwark of the nation. There was no other solution for the moment but to maintain that bulwark, the Reichswehr, however imperfect, however full of preconceived notions, however little prepared mentally to transform itself strategically and technically, if only so that it might be joined, after years of difficult preparation, to an ideological army more dynamic and more reliable, the Waffen SS, the true “Grand Army” of Hitlerism.

There would be evolution, not a blind smashing of everything. Hitler had hardly become chancellor when he declared: “I am resolved to suppress severely any endeavor which would tend to disturb the present order. I shall oppose a second revolutionary wave with all my might, because that would end in veritable chaos. Whosoever shall rise up against the authority of the state will be arrested without regard to his rank or his position in the Party.” (Benoist-Méchin, vol. III, 171.)

Revolution by violence was thus a closed chapter. “Revolution,” Hitler had said, “is not a permanent state, and it must not become a permanent state.” “We have the task of attaining one position after another and little by little occupying each position in an exemplary fashion.”

And again: “The victorious German revolution has entered the evolutionary stage, that is to say, the work of normal and legal reconstruction.” He was fundamentally a pragmatist.

Others, like Röhm, bent upon reaching for the moon, were not. Hitler tried once more to warn them: “From now on any action that is not in harmony with the laws of the State will be suppressed severely and without mercy, for the National Socialist state cannot tolerate any private intervention in its sovereign domain, particularly in its public jurisdiction.” (Brissaud, 159.)

Röhm had bluntly taken a stand in direct opposition to the affirmations of his leader: “We are not a bourgeois club but an association of resolute political combatants. The revolutionary line will be maintained. I want to lead revolutionaries, not men who are pleasing to the shopkeepers.”

Hitler was determined to be very patient in this instance as



*Ernst Röhm (left frame) salutes his storm troopers at a rally at the Berlin Sports Palace while Hitler (right frame) stands nearby. But by June 1934, Röhm was openly critical of Hitler, referring to him as “that ridiculous corporal.” Two of Hitler’s closest subordinates, Hermann Göring, chief of the new Air Ministry, and Heinrich Himmler of the SS, wanted him to move against Röhm in order to rid the party of a rival faction.*

well. He had always been patient. Röhm was a comrade of the early days. His SA men for years had sacrificed themselves in his behalf. Despite their excesses, he could not deny them his gratitude. Röhm’s social threats did not disturb him. There wasn’t much he [Röhm] could do in that area.

It was Hitler who was establishing relations with the industrial leaders. On the military plane, however, it was a different story. A conflict between the Reichswehr and the SA could be catastrophic for Germany. And it was that conflict that Röhm was seeking with his series of provocations. ♦

*Leon Degrelle was an individual of exceptional intellect, dedicated to Western Culture. He fought not only for his country but for the survival of Christian Europe, preventing the continent from being inundated by Stalin’s savage hordes. What Gen. Degrelle has to say, as an eyewitness to some of the key events in the history of the 20th century, is vastly important within the historical and factual context of his time and has great relevance to the continuing struggle today for the survival of civilization as we know it.*

