



*A Frenchman wept
when German troops
marched into Paris,
June 14, 1940.*

Hitler

Chapter 21

Later November 1945

After a 15-minute break, we come back together and continue. I tell the recorders about movie-theater newsreels in America of what was then called the “Battle of Britain,” starting in the spring of 1940. One newsreel that I saw showed high flames from burning buildings and the wailing of sirens. While the bombing of Britain continued, the Royal Air Force bombed more German targets.

I also tell the recorders that I remember when Hitler’s blitzkrieg hit France: “The press and radio in the United States reported the invasion and the Maginot Line mentality of the French. They appeared content that their fortification on the border facing Germany was adequate. The line consisted mostly of tank traps and artillery protected by steel and concrete fortifications:

“Hitler’s blitzkrieg struck at the northern end of the Maginot Line and poured into France. Such a maneuver was like an end run in a

football game. I read that the Maginot Line was useless because its artillery could be aimed only eastward and that it was abandoned by the French.

“During the year of intense bombings of Britain, the American press reported that an equally important ‘Battle of the Atlantic’ was becoming even more intense. German submarines working in ‘wolf-packs’ seriously interrupted merchant shipping from many countries. American cargo ships were being hit as well. Pleas for help came from Churchill. All these events were heavily publicized in the United States,” I continue.

“After his election to a third term in November 1940, President Roosevelt announced his Lend Lease program. He made a major radio address in late 1940, saying that helping Britain would help the United States keep its own democracy. He used a simple illustration: ‘A neighbor’s house is on fire, and he needs to use my water hose. Should I lend it to him or hold out for the price I paid for it? No. All I want is my hose back after he has put out the fire.’ He said he would send destroyers to Britain, using the term ‘Arsenal of Democracy’ to describe the role of the United States. The other side of the bargain was that the United States would get the use of British islands in Newfoundland, Bermuda, the Caribbean, and British Guiana for common defense of the hemisphere. Congress passed the Lend Lease Act in April 1941.

“Well, I’ve said my piece. Now, who would like to carry on?”

“I’ll try,” says Reynitz. “Another event during the Battle of Britain was the Italian invasion of Africa. I remember this as a kind of side war, with Mussolini apparently wanting a piece of the pie. When the British forces drove the Italians back, Hitler came to Mussolini’s aid,

sending Gen. Erwin Rommel and his Afrika Korps and quickly regaining the area the Italians had lost.

“In late 1940, Mussolini sent troops into Albania and Greece. The Greeks soundly beat the Italians and drove them back into Albania.”

“What happened next?” I turn to Buchholz.

“Rudolf Hess, who was the third-ranking German, behind Hitler and Goering, made a stunning parachute drop into Scotland in May 1941. His purpose was to make a peace treaty with the British, believing that they would join Germany in fighting Russia. He was arrested, and after the war he was tried as a war criminal. He was sentenced to life instead of execution because of his attempt at peace with Britain,” says Buchholz.



Mussolini and Hitler

I remember Hess is now at the Landsberg prison. “Then what?”

“Hitler was massing his troops along the Russian border in early 1941. He was preparing for invasion of Russia. He had more than 3,000,000 troops, 600,000 vehicles, 750,000 horses, 3,600 tanks, and 1,800 planes. I have it here in my notes, as I expected this would be asked,” says Reynitz.

“Why so many horses? This was blitzkrieg, wasn’t it?”

“Yes, but I understand the terrain was too rough in places for mechanized forces to get through. Russia also uses horses, but the Germans who rode horses had rapid-firing weapons. There may have been other reasons, but this was all I heard.”

“How did the attack begin?”

“At 3:00 A.M., for example, when the guard was being changed at Brest on the Russian border, the Germans gunned them down instead of saluting them. A three-pronged attack was directed north to south at Leningrad, Moscow, and Kiev. Hitler wanted to have it over with before winter because his troops had only summer clothing.”

“Wishful thinking! Can you continue?” I ask Reynitz.

“Hitler announced the attack, but only after it started. I heard Hitler’s speech on the radio. He said he needed more land for Lebensraum,” Reynitz continues.

“On that day everybody was silent, wondering when the war would end. In a fortnight, the trains came from Russia with wounded German soldiers. Nobody could expect anymore that the blitzkrieg would bring the war to an end quickly as in France, because the Russian front—from the North Cape to the Black Sea—was 1,700 miles,” Reynitz recalls.

I see Krieger move forward, a quizzical look on his face. “How do you figure 1,700 miles?”

“Well, 100 miles equals 161 kilometers, so 1,700 miles equals about 2,900 kilometers. It’s a long stretch,” replies Reynitz.

“I see you’re about right,” Krieger allows.

“Let me tell you this,” I put in. “While German forces were still advancing in the fall of 1941, I made a trip to Washington, D.C., on legal business. I called a good friend from St. Paul to invite him to lunch. Instead, he insisted I have lunch with him at the Press Club, where he was a member.

“After lunch and an interesting talk by a popular columnist, the crowd of nearly 300 left in a hurry. My friend and I relaxed and stayed

to avoid the crunch at the three elevators. When we finally rose to leave, my friend introduced me to a tall, courtly man who was the resident head of Tass, the Russian news agency. He was sitting at the next table. I couldn't resist asking him about Hitler's invasion of his country. At that time American news reports were telling of Hitler's swift attacks into Russia.

"I asked the Tass chief how the war was going, thinking I would get a shrug or a noncommittal comment. Instead, he was open and talkative. He said, 'We have a large country. We know it better, and this gives us the time we need.' I asked him, 'How will you be able to stop the huge forces of the Germans?' His reply was, 'We will let them sink farther into our large featherbed, then smother them.'" I conclude the aside, then return to Krieger's topic: "Please go on."

"The goal was to take Leningrad, Moscow, and Kiev before winter started. The plan failed in November 1941 because the German soldiers and their equipment were not prepared for deep-freeze weather."

"No wonder. This alone illustrates that Hitler didn't know how to direct a war. But he seemed bent on taking Russia as he had written he would in *Mein Kampf*." I glance at Krieger.

He says calmly: "An amazing thing happened. The Russians removed the machinery from many factories and moved it farther to the east. They got it all out ahead of the German forces, I discovered later at headquarters. It was often mentioned that the Russian counterattacks were furious and constant, starting at Moscow.

"When Hitler's attacks failed, he made a broadcast speech at a big rally at the Sportpalast. He said, as I recall, 'Russia is already broken and will never rise again.' He was very confident of victory in Russia."

Then Krieger stands: "It was like a thunderbolt to hear on Decem-

ber 7, 1941, that Japan struck the U.S. fleet at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. The fleet was almost destroyed. Four days later Hitler declared war on the United States.”

“Why did he do that?” I wonder.

Krieger goes on, all eyes upon him. “I learned later at war headquarters that there was an agreement between Germany and Japan. Only a month before, about a dozen countries, including Japan, renewed the Anti-Comintern Pact. Before that, Hitler had congratulated Japan on conquering Manchuria. I would not be surprised if Germany and Japan had agreed to a declaration of war by Germany on the United States should Japan strike first.”

I explain to the recorders that evidence of this is being adduced at the Nuremberg trial. Then, “What did the German people think of all this?” I address Jonuschat.

He moves forward in his chair. “Most of us wondered what was the use of it all. As I told you before, Hitler’s goal of Lebensraum did not move Germans much because they did not see a need for more territory. They certainly wouldn’t move to live and work in Russia.”

“That would be something,” I say. “Germans working in Russia. It would be like ants living among anteaters.”

“Or sheep living among wolves,” says Reynitz. Everyone laughs.

Changing the subject, I ask, “What did the German people think of the Communists?”

“Most Germans were fearful. But those I knew and talked with did not feel it necessary to attack Russia to contain them. Most felt taking Czechoslovakia and regaining the Polish Corridor by an agreement with Russia, followed by the war in Poland, went far enough.”

He is right, of course, and I ask, “Did the German people think the invasion of Russia was justified?”

Krieger begins: “On the whole, Germans were nervous and bewildered by the attack on Russia. Personally, I felt that with the long front going into Russia, it would be impossible, geographically, to win. The invasion, with all the problems of constantly attacking and keeping up supply for those massive forces, could never succeed, I felt, though I am no military expert by any means.

“Hitler did not trust his ‘old-school’ generals, who occasionally retreated when confronted by heavy Russian counterattacks. He dismissed two older generals who had retreated and replaced them with younger officers he trusted. Hitler promoted colonels to generals.”

“What was going on in the Russian war?” I glance toward Reynitz, who clasps his hands inside out, making his knuckles crack.

“There was fierce fighting southeast of Kiev in the Caucasus toward the oil fields. When his troops were losing ground, Hitler sometimes would say, ‘If we lose that place, the war is over.’ Then, when the place was lost, he would order an attack at another place as though the recent defeat never happened,” Reynitz goes on.

“Though he often overruled the advice of his military chiefs, they did not argue against him. They would not dare. The only exception I remember was when he consented to retreat from some mountains of the Caucasus,” concludes Reynitz.

“Why wouldn’t they dare?” I ask Buchholz.

“If a general tried to argue against him, Hitler would go into a rage and talk, talk, talk. Hitler knew his greatest strength was in making speeches, and he used them to control his generals. Only two generals, Alfred Jodl and Erwin Rommel, tried to argue with him after he

gave his orders, and after his speech they were soon silent,” Buchholz verifies what has been said earlier.

“Hitler’s blitzkrieg had failed. It was now the bitter winter of 1941–42. What was the reaction among the people in Germany?” I ask Thoet, who holds his chin.

“It became apparent during the winter that the German armies had been stalled. The Russians continued counterattacking



Gen. Erwin Rommel

fiercely. There was general discussion as to when the war in Russia would end. German soldiers were returning to Germany with severe cases of frostbite. Among those with whom I had contact, there was simply bewilderment.”

“What did you do during that winter?” I ask Jonuschat.

“I was still in the Wehrmacht, doing mostly guard duty, but I was often called to do my usual work at the Reichstag while wearing my army uniform. I was able to visit occasionally with my family near Berlin,” he replies while stretching once more.

“Was there any favorable news?”

“The only favorable news for Hitler in 1942 was that General Rommel’s Afrika Korps was winning out over the British and threat-

ening Egypt. Hitler's U-boats [submarines] were sinking British and American ships in record numbers. Hitler now held a big portion of Russia, as well as western Europe. This was probably the highest point in Hitler's conquests. He occupied more territory than Napoleon ever did," Jonuschat recalls.

We are getting weary, I think. I've run out of questions momentarily, and there is complete silence. Then Reynitz begins to sing:

Show me the way to go home
I'm tired and want to go to bed
I had a little wine about an hour ago
and it went right to my head.

Laughter. "Where did you learn that song?"

"From the Americans at Berchtesgaden."

I look at my watch. "Good heavens, it's past 11:00. The time has gone fast. I can't tell you how much I appreciate this. So much happened, and your memories are just great."

"We have told you the main parts, not the details," says Krieger.

They go to the closet for their topcoats. Then all shake hands with me and depart.



The Nazis recorded the results of air-pressure experiments on Dachau inmates. Though custom dictated the release of prisoners who survived such experiments, this subject appears to be the same one pictured in the experiment on page 241.