

OFFICE OF STRATEGIC SERVICES
RDS ARMY AND ANALYSIS BRANCH
BIOGRAPHICAL REPORT

CONFIDENTIAL 36.02

Herbert Down

Name:

HESS, Rudolf

Positions:

Stellvertreter des Führers der NSDAP (Deputy of Hitler as leader of the Nazi Party), 21 April 1933-1941.

Reichsminister ohne Geschäftsbereich (Reich Minister without Portfolio), 1 December 1938-1941.

Mitglied des Geheimen Kabinettsrats (Member of the Secret Cabinet Council), 4 February 1938-1941.

Mitglied des Ministerrats für die Reichsverteidigung (Member of the Ministerial Council for the Defense of the Reich), 30 August 1939-1941.

Member of the Reichstag, March 1933-1941

SS-Obergruppenführer, 1933 (?) - 1941.

Birth date and place: 26 April 1896, Alexandria, Egypt.

Religion: Protestant

Family History:

Hess' grandfather emigrated from Wunsiedel/Fichtelgebirge to Alexandria, Egypt, where he established an import business, which subject's father, Fritz Hess, took over. Hess' mother was Klara Münch of Hof a. S. Hess married Ilse Prochl of Hannover in 1927. They have one son, born in 1937. 1/

Education:

For six years Hess attended the German school in Alexandria. From 1906 to 1908 he was educated by a private tutor and subsequently was sent to Germany by his parents, where he attended the high school (Realschule) at Godesberg a/Rh. (1908-1911). Although particularly interested in mathematics and the natural sciences, he attended business college in Neuchâtel, Switzerland, for a year and from 1912 until the outbreak of World War I served as a commercial apprenticeship in Hamburg in order to prepare himself to take over his father's business in Alexandria.

Work and Political History:

At the outbreak of World War I Hess joined 1st Bavarian Infantry Regiment as a volunteer. His regiment (the so-called List Regiment) suffered extremely high casualties in the fighting on the Western front. Hess was wounded in June 1916 near Verdun and again in 1917, when he received a shot in the lung. Promoted to the rank of lieutenant, he became a member of the 18th Bavarian Infantry Reserve Regiment in Munich.

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In 1918 he volunteered for the Air Corps. He received pilot's training at the Fliegerschule 4 in Lechfeld and the Jagdstaffelschule Mivelles. In the fall of 1918 he joined the Jagdstaffel 35 (Fighter Squadron 35) on the Westfront.

After Germany's defeat in November 1918, Hess went to Munich, where he soon joined the nationalistic, anti-Semitic Thulesgesellschaft and the Freikorps Dpp. He participated in the fight against the leftist government of Bavaria (Räteregierung) and narrowly escaped being shot as a hostage. In the course of a fight against Social Democrats on 1 May 1919 he was wounded in the leg. In 1920 Hess enrolled at the University of Munich as a student of economics, history and geopolitics (under Haushofer). In June 1920 he joined the Nazi Party, then in its very beginnings, and soon became one of Hitler's closest personal collaborators. 2/

When in November 1921 Social Democrats protested against a Nazi Party meeting in the Munich Hofbräuhaus, Hess provoked a brawl, and as a result suffered a head injury. The armed Nazi bands present at this and similar meetings were organized into the SA (stormtroops) following this encounter. 3/ Hess became one of the active leaders of the SA. He organized a special group within the SA, composed primarily of students, the so-called NS Studentenhundertschaft (NS Student Organization of One Hundred), 4/ later called NS Studentenbattalion (NS Student Battalion).

Hess played a prominent part in the putsch of 9 November 1923. During the night of November 8, Hess sent armed gangs to seize Bavarian political leaders as hostages. Together with Hitler he entered the Bürgerbräu on the 9th in order to arrest the Bavarian Generalstaatskommissar, Gustav von Kahr, and then drove to Southern Bavaria with the Bavarian Minister of the Interior, Schweyer, and another minister as his hostages. Thus he did not participate in the march to the Feldherrnhalle, which ended with Hitler's precipitate flight. The Nazi plot to overthrow the Bavarian government having failed, Hess escaped across the mountains into Austria. 5/ However, he returned to Germany shortly afterwards and was condemned to one and a half years imprisonment (Festungshaft), for attempted high treason. He served seven and a half months of his sentence in the Landsberg fortress together with Hitler. Hitler dictated parts of his book, Mein Kampf, to Hess during this time. It is alleged by some that Karl Haushofer's concepts of geopolitics thus, via his student Hess, found way into Mein Kampf. 6/

Released from Landsberg at the end of 1924, Hess served for a short while as assistant to Haushofer in the latter's capacity as head of the Deutsche Akademie (German Academy) in Munich, but later in the year became Hitler's private secretary and personal adjutant, a position he retained until 1933. Not until 1932 did he receive any official position in the NSDAP. 7/

Through his constant close collaboration with Hitler, Hess won the Führer's complete confidence and eventually rose to a position of great power under the Nazi regime. In the years before the Nazis came to power, he accompanied Hitler on most of his speaking tours, wrote propaganda pamphlets and acted as his personal adviser. When Gregor Strasser broke with Hitler late in 1932, thus threatening to to disrupt the Nazi Party entirely, Hitler reorganized the party leadership to crush the opposition. A new Politische Zentralkommission (Central Political Commission) was established and Hess was appointed its head. In this capacity he had to supervise the political activities of the Nazi party factions in the state assemblies, and to determine questions of general political strategy. 8/

On 4 January 1933 Hess took part in the meeting between Hitler and Papen at the house of the banker, Kurt von Schröder, which paved the way for Hitler's appointment as chancellor on 30 January 1933. 9/ In March 1933 Hess was elected a member of the Reichstag, which soon afterwards passed the Ermächtigungs-gesetz, which made the power of the Nazis in Germany secure. He held the rank of SS Obergrouppenführer at least from 1933 on. 9A/

His regime firmly established, Hitler rewarded Hess for his services in bringing the Nazi regime to power, by appointing him his Deputy, i.e. in Hitler's capacity as head of the Nazi Party (Stellvertreter des Führers der NSDAP). 10/ Next to Hitler, Hess was the supreme head of the Nazi Party with authority to act on behalf of Hitler in all matters concerning party policy. He thus not only had overall supervision of all party offices, party formations and affiliated organizations, (with power to reorganize them to issue rules and regulations as to membership, activities, funds, etc.) but had an entire staff of his own (Stab des Stellvertreters des Führers) to see that his policies were carried out.

Among the many measures adopted by Hess as deputy head of the Nazi Party only a few can be mentioned here. On 3 May 1933, for example, he authorized Robert Ley (q.v.) to establish the German Labor Front. 11/ On 10 July 1933 he decreed the establishment of the Hochschulkommission der NSDAP, (University Commission of the NSDAP) which was to function under his direct supervision. The Commission was to act as liaison between the Nazi Party and all ministries which had any part in university administration. It was designed to prevent the appointment of any persons but reliable Nazis to university positions and to insure that Nazi principles were reflected in German educational policy. 12/ Hess extended his influence over university life further, when he announced on 18 July 1934 that the Nationalsozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund (NS German Students' Association) would be strictly under his control. On 14 November 1934 he decreed that the NSDStB was to be the only student organization permitted to function in Germany. 13/ On 14 May 1935 Hess established the NS Studentenkampfhilfe, an organization of university graduates, in order to obtain financial support for the activities of the NSDStB. In May 1937 it was decreed that no other organization of university graduates would henceforth be allowed to exist in Germany. The Nazi organization was renamed NS Altkamerbund (NS Association of University Graduates) on 5 May 1938. 14/ Another decree of Hess' (24 July 1935) established compulsory membership in the NS Dozentenbund (NS University Professors Association) for all University Professors. 15/

Another Nazi organization which owed its existence to Hess' initiative was the Arbeitsgemeinschaft katholischer Deutscher (Association of Catholic Germans) headed by Franz Papen (q.v.) which represented the active Nazi elements among the Catholic population of Germany and was to stamp out political opposition in Catholic Circles. 16/ On 16 April 1934 Hess established the Prüfungskommission zum Schutze des NS Schrifttums (Commission for the Protection of NS Literature), which was to censor all publications relating to National Socialist history, ideology, organization of leadership, so as to prevent any possible "misrepresentation" of the Nazi movement in the eyes of the public. 17/

Hess' power to determine membership qualifications in the Nazi Party and its affiliated organizations has already been mentioned. On 24 May 1934, for example, he decreed that former members of Free Mason organizations could not hold leading positions in the Party or the SA. 18/ On 27 January 1936 he imposed a ban on further membership in the NS Frauenschaft (NS Women's Organization).

It was Hess, furthermore, who every year at the Nürnberg Party Congresses or other solemn party occasions administered the oath of allegiance to the newly appointed Politische Leiter (political leaders) of the Nazi party, to members of the Hitler Youth and EDH admitted to membership in the Nazi party, etc. After the annexation of Austria in 1938, Hess on 24 July installed the seven new Gauleiters of Austria. Following the annexation of the Czech Sudeten area in the fall of 1938 he formally received the Sudetendeutsche Partei (the Nazi party of the Sudeten Germans) into the NSDAP at a huge political rally at Reichenberg, the new Gauhauptstadt (District capital). 21/

As Stellvertreter des Führers der NSDAP Hess represented Hitler at many public occasions, party rallies, congresses, etc., serving as his faithful mouthpiece in presenting Nazi policies to the public. He was ever ready to defend Hitler's policies, and to demand blind obedience to the Führer from his followers. 22/ In connection with the purge of 30 June 1934, Hess played a rather important part. He urged Hitler to take steps against Röhm, gathering "evidence" as to Röhm's contemplated insurrection. Through Hess, Hitler made an offer of reconciliation to Röhm, if Röhm would accept Hitler's terms. One source reports, furthermore, that next to Göring, Hess was one of the main executioners of the purge and subsequently was the first to defend the events of 30 June 1934 in public. Together with Stabschef (Chief of Staff) Lüttze, he reorganized the SA after the "liquidation" of Röhm and his followers. 23/

Hess' influence, however was by no means limited to party matters. The NSDAP was not a political party in the accepted sense. By the law of 24 July 1933 the only legal party in Germany, 24/ it was the powerful tool of the Nazi ruling group in dominating the German people. Time and again the Nazis proclaimed that the NSDAP was the supreme source of public authority in Germany, that it was the bearer of the idea of the state. Through a series of measures giving high Nazi Party officials control over governmental matters, the hold of the Party on the government was assured. Hess, as Stellvertreter des Führers der NSDAP, received increasingly broad powers, giving him control in matters of government as well as party policy.

On 29 June 1933 Hess was authorized to take part in the sessions of the Reich Cabinet, and on 1 December 1933 under the "Law to assure the unity of Party and State" (Gesetz zur Sicherung der Einheit von Partei und Staat), Hess was given rank of Reichsminister ohne Geschäftsbereich (Reich Minister without Portfolio) 25/ By orders of Hitler of 27 July 1934 and 6 April 1935 Hess was authorized to participate in the formation of legislation by all departments of the Reich government as well as by the state governments (Landesregierungen). He was also to take part in the preparation of Führererlasse (personal decrees of Hitler). The order was designed to prevent the enactment of any legislation in Germany, which did not accord with the policies of the Nazi Party. Even previously the so-called Verbindungsstab (liaison staff), established and directed by Hess, had referred the wishes of the Nazi Party to the government agencies, thus serving as a more informal check of the party on governmental activities. 26/ In particular Hess signed the anti-Jewish legislation (the so-called Nürnberg Laws) of 1935. 26A/

Hess' control was extended to municipal affairs through the new Gemeindeordnung of 1935 (Law concerning Municipalities). The office of Beauftragter der NSDAP (Delegate of the NSDAP) in each community was established. The Delegate was to check on the activities of mayors, town councillors and other local officials and prevent the adoption of any measures objectionable from the Nazi point of view. It was left to Hess to determine who was to serve as Beauftragter der NSDAP and to issue directives as to their activities. 27/

To leave no aspect of government activity free from Nazi control, two further orders of Hitler (24 September 1935, 10 July 1937) stipulated that no Senator (government official) or Arbeitsdienstführer (Leader of the Labor Service) could be appointed without the consent of Hess or his authorized representative. 28/

On 4 February 1938 Hitler established the Geheimer Kabinettsrat (Secret Cabinet Council), which, according to official announcement, was to advise Hitler on matters of foreign policy. Hess was appointed a member of this Council, which shares responsibility for planning the Nazi policies of Foreign aggression. 29/ Available information indicates that Hess was prominently involved in the machinations which led to the German annexation of Austria in March 1938. The Nazis were looking for an excuse to invade Austria. Hess, therefore devised a scheme, whereby Nazi agents disguised as Austrian patriots, were to assassinate the German Ambassador, von Papen (q.v.), thus furnishing the necessary pretext for Nazi interference. The scheme failed, because the Austrian police discovered the document containing Hess' plan (the so-called R. H. document) in a raid on the illegal Nazi center on Teinfaltstrasse in Vienna and informed Papen of the scheme. 30/

Just before the outbreak of World War II, Hess received another appointment as member of the Ministerrat für die Reichsverteidigung (Ministerial Council for the Defense of the Reich), established by decree of Hitler of 30 August 1939 for the "unified direction of the government and of economy." 31/ In this Council of six members supreme legislative as well as executive authority was concentrated. Its decrees had the force of laws even without the signature of Hitler. The power of the Council extended to the regional administrative level. It was represented by a Reichsverteidigungskommissar (Reich Defense Commissioner) in each Wehrkreis (Army Corps Area), who coordinated defense activities and was authorized to give orders to every administrative agency in his area. Usually the Nazi Party Gauleiter was appointed Reich Defense Commissioner.

In 1941 Hess' political career came to an unexpected end. On 10 May a world was startled by the announcement that the Deputy of the Führer had landed in Scotland, parachuting from a twin-motored Messerschmidt which crashed. He was promptly interned by the British authorities. Although there has been endless conjecture and speculation as to the factors which led to Hess' flight to England, the real facts, if known, have not so far been published. Held in a secret country retreat, he was in 1943 reported to have turned quite moody, passing his time composing flowery sonnets. 32/ More recently he was reported to be detained in an insane asylum in Wales. He is on the list of twenty-four top Nazi war criminals to be tried in Nürnberg. 33/

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Sources:

1/ Wer Ist's? 1935
Washington Post, 6 June(?), 1945.

2/ Wer Ist's, 1935
Deutsches Führerlexikon, 1935

3/ Heiden, Konrad, Der Führer (Houghton Mifflin Co., 1944), p. 88
Wer Ist's 1935.

4/ The SA was organized in groups of 100 each, hence the name NS Studenten Burschenschaft.
Volz, Hans, Diktat der Geschichte der NSDAP (9th ed. Berlin, Verlag der NSDAP, 1937), p. 13.

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- 5/ Wer Ist's? 1935
Deutsches Führerlexikon, 1935
Heiden, op. cit., pp. 193, 195, 203
- 6/ Volz, op. cit., pp. 15-16, 21
Current Biography, 1942
Wer Ist's? 1935.
Deutsches Führerlexikon, 1935.
- 7/ Wer Ist's? 1935
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NS Jahrbuch, 1933
- 8/ Wer Ist's? 1935.
Deutsches Führerlexikon, 1935.
Heiden, op. cit., p. 506.
- 9/ Volz, op. cit., p. 46.
- 9A/ Reichstagshandbuch, 1933.
- 10/ Horkenbach, Cuno, Das Deutsche Reich von 1918 bis Heute, (Berlin,
Presse-und Wirtschafts-Verlag GmbH, 1935), p. 857.
Volz, op. cit., pp. 43, 53.
Deutsches Führerlexikon, 1935.
- 11/ Horkenbach, op. cit., p. 198
- 12/ Ruhle, Gerd, Das dritte Reich, Dokumentarische Darstellung des
Aufbaus der Nation (Berlin, Hummelverlag, 1933-1937), II, 221-222.
Volz, op.cit., p. 62
- 13/ Volz, op. cit., pp. 62-63.
Rühlo, op. cit., II, 226; V, 134.
Horkenbach, op. cit., p. 852.
- 14/ Volz, op. cit., p. 33
Rühle, op. cit., IV, 360; V. 136-137.
Meyer-Benneckenstein, Paul (ed.), Dokumente der Deutschen Politik
(Berlin, Junker und Dornhauptverlag), v, 411-412.
Ibid., Vol 6, pt. 2, p. 716.
- 15/ Horkenbach, op. cit., p. 857.
- 17/ Rühle, op. cit., pp. 34-130.
- 18/ Dokumente der Deutschen Politik, Vol. 6, pt. 1, p. 54.
- 19/ Volz, op. cit., p. 63.
Rühle, op. cit., IV, 25
- 20/ Rühle, op. cit., 1934-1937, passim.
See also Volz, op. cit.,
- 21/ Dokumente der Deutschen Politik, Vol. 6, pt. 1, pp. 122, 241.

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- 22/ Dokumente der Deutschen Politik, as well as Rühle's, Das Dritte Reich, contains reprints of a good many of his speeches.
- 23/ Hitler's Reichstag speech on the events of 30 June 1934, Rühle, op. cit., II, 239. Ibid., 249-250.
Heiden, op. cit., pp. 747, 755.
Current Biography, 1942.
- 24/ Gesetz gegen Neubildung der Parteien, 14 July 1933 (RGBl I, 479),
Horkenbach, op. cit., p. 840.
- 25/ Volz, op. cit., pp. 48, 53.
Horkenbach, op. cit., pp. 268, 607-608. (RGBl 1933, I, 1016; 1934, I, 529.)
NS Jahrbuch, 1935.
- 26/ Deutsches Führerlexikon, 1935 26A/ Reichsgesetzblatt I, 1146;
Volz, op. cit., p. 53. I-1333; I-1334.
Rühle, op. cit., II, 295.
NS Jahrbuch, 1935
NS Jahrbuch, 1941
- 27/ Rühle, op. cit., III, 49-50.
Horkenbach, op. cit., p. 825 (RGBl I, 49.)
NS Jahrbuch, 1941.
- 28/ NS Jahrbuch, 1941.
Volz, op. cit., p. 53.
Dokumente der Deutschen Politik, V. 249.
- 29/ Erlass des Führers und Reichskanzlers über die Errichtung eines
Geheimen Kabinettsrats vom 4. February 1938, Dokumente der Deutschen Politik, Vol 6, pt. I, #1 a, p. 4.
- 30/ OSS Source T, August 1945.
- 31/ Reichsgesetzblatt 1939, I 1539.
NS Jahrbuch, 1941.
OSS Source F, II 356-2A, 3 November 1943.
- 32/ New York Times, 30 August 1945.
- 33/ New York Times, 27 August 1945.

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