**Night of the Long Knives**

In February, 1934, Hitler had a meeting with Group Captain [Frederick Winterbotham](https://spartacus-educational.com/Frederick_Winterbottom.htm). Hitler told him that there should be only three major powers in the world, the British empire, the American empire and the future German empire. "All we ask is that Britain should be content to look after her empire and not interfere with Germany's plans of expansion." He then went on to deal with the subject of Communism. "He stood up and, as if he was an entirely different personality, he started to yell in a high-pitched staccato voice... He ranted and raved against the Communists." It was later speculated that Hitler was letting Britain know he intended to purge the left-wing of the [Nazi Party](https://spartacus-educational.com/GERnazi.htm). (16)

[Heinrich Himmler](https://spartacus-educational.com/GERhimmler.htm) and [Karl Wolff](https://spartacus-educational.com/Karl_Wolff.htm) went to visit [Ernst Röhm](https://spartacus-educational.com/GERroehm.htm) at the SA headquarters at the end of April. According to Wolff he "implored Röhm to dissociate himself from his evil companions, whose prodigal life, alcoholic excesses, vandalism and homosexual cliques were bringing the whole movement into disrepute". He then said with moist eyes, "do not inflict me with the burden of having to get my people to act against you". Röhm, also with tears in his eyes, thanked his old comrade for giving him this warning. (17)

On 4th June, 1934, Hitler held a five-hour meeting with Röhm. According to Hitler's account he told Röhm that he had heard that "certain conscienceless elements were preparing a Nationalist-Bolshevik revolution, which could lead only to miseries beyond description". Hitler informed Röhm that some people suspected that he was the leader of a group who "praise the Communist paradise of the future, which, in reality, would only lead to a battle for Hell." (18)

After the meeting Röhm told friends that he was convinced that he could rely on Hitler to take his side against "the gentlemen with uniforms and monocles". (19) [Louis L. Snyder](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis_Leo_Snyder) argues that Hitler had in fact decided to give his support to Röhm's enemies: "Hitler later alleged that his trusted friend Röhm had entered a conspiracy to take over political power. The Führer was told, possibly by one of Röhm's jealous colleagues, that Röhm intended to use the SA to bring a socialist state into existence... Hitler came to his final decision to eliminate the socialist element in the party." (20)

On 11th June 1934, [Hjalmar Schacht](https://spartacus-educational.com/GERschacht.htm) had a private meeting with the Governor of the Bank of England, his personal friend and business associate, [Montagu Norman](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montagu_Norman,_1st_Baron_Norman). Both men were members of the [Anglo-German Fellowship](https://spartacus-educational.com/Anglo-German_Fellowship.htm) group and shared a "fundamental dislike" of the "French, Roman Catholics, Jews". (21) Schacht told Norman that there would be no "second revolution" and that the SA were about to be purged. (22)

[Heinrich Himmler](https://spartacus-educational.com/GERhimmler.htm), [Reinhard Heydrich](https://spartacus-educational.com/GERheydrich.htm), [Hermann Göring](https://spartacus-educational.com/2WWgoring.htm) and [Theodore Eicke](https://spartacus-educational.com/GEReicke.htm) worked on drawing up a list of people who were to be eliminated. It was known as the "Reich List of Unwanted Persons". (23) The list included [Ernst Röhm](https://spartacus-educational.com/GERroehm.htm), [Edmund Heines](https://spartacus-educational.com/Edmund_Heines.htm), [Karl Ernst](https://spartacus-educational.com/Karl_Ernst.htm), [Hans Erwin von Spreti](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans_Erwin_von_Spreti-Weilbach) and [Julius Uhl](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julius_Uhl) of the SA, [Gregor Strasser](https://spartacus-educational.com/GERstrasser.htm), [Kurt von Schleicher](https://spartacus-educational.com/GERschleicher.htm), Hitler's predecessor as chancellor, [Gustav von Kahr](https://spartacus-educational.com/GERkahr.htm), who crushed the [Beer Hall Putsch](https://spartacus-educational.com/GERbeer.htm) in 1923, [Herbert von Bose](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herbert_von_Bose) and [Edgar Jung](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edgar_Julius_Jung), two men who worked for [Franz von Papen](https://spartacus-educational.com/GERpapen.htm) and [Fritz Gerlich](https://spartacus-educational.com/Fritz_Gerlich.htm), a journalist who had investigated the death of Hitler's niece, [Geli Raubal](https://spartacus-educational.com/GERraubal.htm). (24)

[Ernst Röhm](https://spartacus-educational.com/GERroehm.htm) and [Hans Erwin von Spreti](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans_Erwin_von_Spreti-Weilbach)

Also on the list was [Erich Klausener](https://spartacus-educational.com/Erich_Klausener.htm), the President of the [Catholic Action](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholic_Action) movement, who had been making speeches against Hitler. It was feared that he was building up a strong following from within the Catholic Church. On 24th June, 1934, Klausener had organized a meeting held at Hoppegarten racecourse, where he spoke out against political oppression in front of an audience of 60,000. (25)

On the evening of 28th June, 1934, Hitler telephoned Röhm to convene a conference of the SA leadership at [Hanselbauer Hotel](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_image.cfm?image_id=1895" \t "_blank) in [Bad Wiesse](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bad_Wiessee), two days later. "The call served the double purpose of gathering the SA chiefs in one out-of-the-way spot, and reassuring Röhm that, despite the rumours flying about, their mutual compact was safe. No doubt Röhm expected the discussion to centre on the radical change of government in his favour promised for the autumn." (26)

The following day Hitler held a meeting with [Joseph Goebbels](https://spartacus-educational.com/GERgoebbels.htm). He told him that he had decided to act against Röhm and the SA. Hitler felt he could not take the risk of "breaking with the conservative middle-class elements in the Reichswehr, industry, and the civil service". By eliminating Röhm he could make it clear that he rejected the idea of a "socialist revolution". Although he disagreed with the decision, Goebbels decided not to speak out against "Operation Humingbird" in case he was also eliminated. (27)

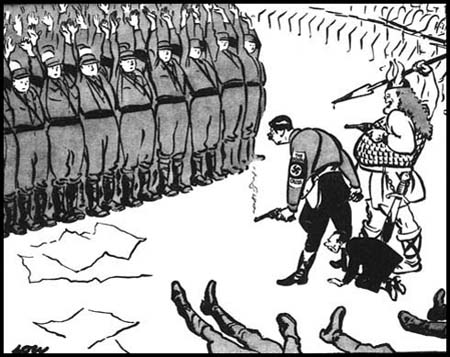
On 29th June, [Karl Ernst](https://spartacus-educational.com/Karl_Ernst.htm) got married and as he planned to go on his honeymoon and therefore could not attend the SA meeting at the Hanselbauer Hotel. [Ernst Röhm](https://spartacus-educational.com/GERroehm.htm) and [Hermann Göring](https://spartacus-educational.com/2WWgoring.htm) both attended the wedding. (28) Later that day he alerted the Berlin SA that he had heard rumours that there was a danger of a putsch against Hitler by the right-wing of the party. (29)

At around 6.30 in the morning of 30th June, Hitler arrived at the hotel in a fleet of cars full of armed [Schutzstaffel](https://spartacus-educational.com/GERss.htm) (SS) men. (30) [Erich Kempka](https://spartacus-educational.com/Erich_Kempka.htm), Hitler's chauffeur, witnessed what happened: "Hitler entered Röhm's bedroom alone with a whip in his hand. Behind him were two detectives with pistols at the ready. He spat out the words; *Röhm, you are under arrest*. Röhm's doctor comes out of a room and to our surprise he has his wife with him. I hear Lutze putting in a good word for him with Hitler. Then Hitler walks up to him, greets him, shakes hand with his wife and asks them to leave the hotel, it isn't a pleasant place for them to stay in, that day. Now the bus arrives. Quickly, the SA leaders are collected from the laundry room and walk past Röhm under police guard. Röhm looks up from his coffee sadly and waves to them in a melancholy way. At last Röhm too is led from the hotel. He walks past Hitler with his head bowed, completely apathetic." (31)

[Edmund Heines](https://spartacus-educational.com/Edmund_Heines.htm) was found in bed with his chauffeur and along with Röhm were taken to [Stadelheim Prison](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stadelheim_Prison" \t "_blank). At the Munich railroad station, the SA leaders were beginning to arrive. As they alighted from the incoming trains they were taken into custody by SS troops. It is estimated that about 200 senior SA officers were arrested during what became known as the Night of the Long Knives. (32)

One of Röhm's boyfriends, [Karl Ernst](https://spartacus-educational.com/Karl_Ernst.htm), and the head of the SA in Berlin, had just married and was driving to [Bremen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bremen) with his bride to board a ship for a honeymoon in [Madeira](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madeira). His car was overtaken by [Schutzstaffel](https://spartacus-educational.com/GERss.htm) (SS) gunman, who fired on the car, wounding his wife and his chauffeur. Ernst was taken back to SS headquarters and executed later that day. (33)

A large number of the SA officers were shot as soon as they were captured but [Adolf Hitler](https://spartacus-educational.com/GERhitler.htm) decided to pardon Röhm because of his past services to the movement. However, after much pressure from Göring and Himmler, Hitler agreed that Röhm should die. Himmler ordered [Theodor Eicke](https://spartacus-educational.com/GEReicke.htm) to carry out the task. Eicke and his adjutant, [Michael Lippert](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Lippert), travelled to [Stadelheim Prison](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stadelheim_Prison" \t "_blank) in [Munich](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Munich) where Röhm was being held. Eicke placed a pistol on a table in Röhm's cell and told him that he had 10 minutes in which to use the weapon to kill himself. Röhm replied: "If Adolf wants to kill me, let him do the dirty work." (34)

[David Low](https://spartacus-educational.com/Jlow.htm), *They salute with both hands now!* (3rd July, 1934)

According to [Paul R. Maracin](http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/257219.Paul_R_Maracin), the author of [*The Night of the Long Knives: Forty-Eight Hours that Changed the History of the World*](http://www.amazon.co.uk/s/ref=nb_sb_noss?url=search-alias=stripbooks&field-keywords=The+Night+of+the+Long+Knives%3A+Forty-Eight+Hours+that+Changed+the+History+of+the+World&rh=n%3A266239,k%3AThe+Night+of+the+Long+Knives%3A+Forty-Eight+Hours+that+Changed+the+History+of+the+World) (2004): "Ten minutes later, SS officers Michael Lippert and Theodor Eicke appeared, and as the embittered, scar-faced veteran of verdun defiantly stood in the middle of the cell stripped to the waist, the two SS officers riddled his body with revolver bullets." Eicke later claimed that Röhm fell to the floor moaning "Mein Führer". (35)

[Joseph Goebbels](https://spartacus-educational.com/GERgoebbels.htm) wrote in his diary: "Executions nearly finished. A few more are necessary. That is difficult, but necessary... It is difficult, but is not however to be avoided. There must be peace for ten years. The whole afternoon with the Führer. I can't leave him alone. He suffers greatly, but is hard. The death sentences are received with the greatest seriousness. All in all about 60." (36)

[František Bidlo](https://spartacus-educational.com/Frantisek_Bidlo.htm), *The Tidiest Country in the World*(1934)

[*Time Magazine*](http://time.com/) reported that the men had been executed as a result of a conflict between the SS and SA. It claimed that [Hermann Göring](https://spartacus-educational.com/2WWgoring.htm) and [Gustav Krupp](https://spartacus-educational.com/FWWkrupp.htm) had been involved in the conspiracy. It reported that "Röhm was shot in the back next day by a firing squad". The magazine also reported that the Nazi government insisted that [Herbert von Bose](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herbert_von_Bose) had committed suicide "until it could no longer be concealed that his death was due to six bullets". (37)

Goebbels broadcast the Nazi account of the executions on 10th July. He thanked the German press for "standing by the government with commendable self-discipline and fair-mindedness" and accused the foreign press of issuing false reports so as to create confusion. He stated that these newspapers and magazines had been involved in a "campaign of lies" which he compared to the "atrocity-story campaign waged against Germany" during the [First World War](https://spartacus-educational.com/FWW.htm). (38)

Hitler made a speech where he stated that he acted as "the Supreme Justiciar of the German Volk" and had used this violence "to prevent a revolution". A retrospective law was passed to legitimize the murders. The German judiciary made no protest about the use of the law to legalize murder. These events, however, had a major impact on the outside world: "The killings of 30 June and succeeding days were also an important moment in the history of the Nazi movement. Before the people of Germany, and the outside world, the leaders of the Party were revealed as calculating killers." (39)

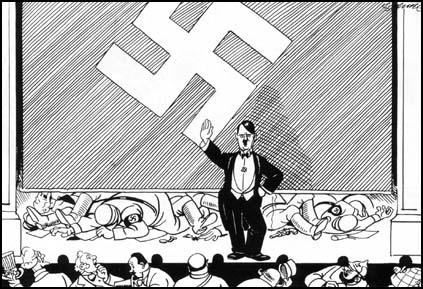
**Aftermath**

It is not known exactly how many people were murdered between 30th June and 2nd July, when Hitler called off the killings. "Bodies were found in fields and woods for weeks afterwards and files of petitions from relatives of the missing remained active for months. What seems certain is that less than half were SA officers." (40)

[Herman Rauschning](https://spartacus-educational.com/Herman_Rauschning.htm) argued that the execution of the leaders of the SA showed that Hitler believed that the [German Army](https://spartacus-educational.com/2WWgermanA.htm) posed no real threat to his government: "They had got their wish: Röhm was removed. The independence of the Reichswehr was assured. That was enough for them. They had no use for civil unrest. They reserved the right to make a special investigation into the shooting of the two generals, von Schleicher, the former Reich Chancellor, and von Bredow. They allowed their one opportunity of shaking off the National Socialist yoke to go by. Without political insight, uncertain and vacillating in everything except their military calling, they were anxious to return as quickly as possible to ordered and regular activities. This failure of the high officials and officers, and also of the big industrial and agricultural interests, was symptomatic of their further attitude. They were no longer capable of any statesmanlike action. In every crisis, they would again be in the opposition, but would always recoil before the final step, the overthrow of the regime." (41)

Hitler told [Albert Speer](https://spartacus-educational.com/GERspeer.htm) what happened at [Bad Wiesse](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bad_Wiessee): "Hitler was extremely excited and, as I believe to this day, inwardly convinced that he had come through a great danger. Again and again he described how he had forced his way into the Hotel Hanselmayer in Wiessee - not forgetting, in the telling, to make a show of his courage: *We were unarmed, imagine, and didn't know whether or not those swine might have armed guards to use against us*. The homosexual atmosphere had disgusted him: *In one room we found two naked boys!* Evidently he believed that his personal action had averted a disaster at the last minute: *I alone was able to solve this problem. No one else!*His entourage tried to deepen his distaste for the executed SA leaders by assiduously reporting as many details as possible about the intimate life of Röhm and his following." (42)

The purge of the SA was kept secret until it was announced by Hitler on 13th July. It was during this speech that Hitler gave the purge its name: Night of the Long Knives (a phrase from a popular Nazi song). Hitler claimed that 61 had been executed while 13 had been shot resisting arrest and three had committed suicide. Others have argued that as many as 400 people were killed during the purge. In his speech Hitler explained why he had not relied on the courts to deal with the conspirators: "In this hour I was responsible for the fate of the German people, and thereby I become the supreme judge of the German people. I gave the order to shoot the ringleaders in this treason."

"Will the audience kindly keep their seats."  
[Sidney Strube](https://spartacus-educational.com/Jstrube.htm), [*Daily Express*](https://spartacus-educational.com/Jexpress.htm) (3rd July, 1934)

[Heinrich Himmler](https://spartacus-educational.com/GERhimmler.htm) made a speech to [Gestapo](https://spartacus-educational.com/GERgestapo.htm) officials on 11th October, 1934: "For us as Secret State Police and as members of the SS, 30 June was not - as several believe - a day of victory or a day of triumph, but it was the hardest day that can be visited on a soldier in his lifetime. To have to shoot one's own comrades, with whom one has stood side by side for eight or ten years in the struggle for an ideal, and who had then failed, is the bitterest thing which can happen to a man. For everyone who knows the Jews, freemasons and Catholics, it was obvious that these forces - who in the final analysis caused even 30 June in so much as they sent numerous individuals into the SA and the entourage of the former Chief of Staff and drove him to catastrophe - these forces were very much annoyed at the rout on 30 June. Because 30 June signified no more and no less than the detonation of the National Socialist state from within, blowing it up with its own people. There would have been chaos, and it would have given a foreign enemy the possibility of marching into Germany with the excuse that order had to be created in Germany." (43)

[Joseph Goebbels](https://spartacus-educational.com/GERgoebbels.htm) later regretted the killing of [Ernst Röhm](https://spartacus-educational.com/GERroehm.htm): "I point out to the Führer at length that in 1934 we unfortunately failed to reform the Wehrmacht when we had an opportunity of doing so. What Röhm wanted was, of course, right in itself but in practice it could not be carried through by a homosexual and an anarchist. Had Röhm been an upright solid personality, in all probability some hundred generals rather than some hundred SA leaders would have been shot on 30 June. The whole course of events was profoundly tragic and today we are feeling its effects. In that year the time was ripe to revolutionize the Reichswehr." (44)