

Hitler's Leadership Style: The Undoing of Germany **By Walter S. Zapotoczny**

Hitler's powerful and relentless leadership style was very successful in the beginning. Hitler directed the "Blitzkrieg" tactics that dominated the first phase of World War II. These bold tactics included sudden shock attacks against airfields, communications centers and military installations. He was the inspiration behind great victories like the Battle of France in May 1940 and the Battle of Kharkov in May 1942. It was Hitler's leadership style along with his inability to make decisions at critical times, which lead to the undoing of Nazi Germany.

Beginning with the reoccupation of the Rhineland in March 1936, Hitler saw his senior officers unwilling to take risks. As time went on, he came to believe that Germany's victories were his alone and that most of his generals were narrow-minded and incapable. Near the end of the war, he ordered that no unit could move without his express permission. He demanded lengthy reports on every armored vehicle and position that his forces lost.

In his February 2002 article for the British Broadcasting Corporation's History Page, Geoffrey Megargee describes Hitler as a meddler in military operations. He illustrates the effect this meddling had on the prosecution of the War. Hitler distrusted his generals and relied too much on his own instinct. According to his so-called "Leadership Principle", ultimate authority rested with him and extended downward. Hitler had an incredible memory for detail. Every point had to be correct and consistent with previous briefings. He would become annoyed at any discrepancies. Hitler combined his insistence on personal control with a leadership style that often consisted of equal parts stubbornness and indecisiveness (Megargee).

Hitler sometimes put off difficult decisions for weeks, especially as the military situation grew worse. In 1943, for instance, his inability to make up his mind about an attack at Kursk, Russia eventually pushed the attack back from April to July. By the time he made up his mind to attack, the Soviet army was well prepared. At other times, Hitler would cling to a decision stubbornly, regardless of its merits.

Writing for the German Historical Institute, Washington, D.C., Hans Mommsen examines how the German political system gradually lost its internal controls. Mommsen describes how Hitler hesitated in making strategic decisions about the execution of the war. For example, when Goebbels, Hitler's Propaganda Minister, urged him to stop fighting on two fronts, Hitler stated that negotiation was out of the question as long as the Wehrmacht (German Army) achieved any military successes. Hitler's strategic decisions corresponded to the same pattern in domestic politics. In pursuing short-term mobilization, the Reich avoided sketching out alternative strategies in case of unanticipated setbacks (Mommsen). Mommsen contends that in the end, Hitler paid for his shortsightedness with increasing inefficiency and a lack of coordination of diverging policies.

Hitler's belief that Germany's victories were his alone left no room for his general's advice. His leadership style coupled with his hesitation to make critical decisions proved to be unworkable in the end and led inevitably to Germany's eventual defeat.

Bibliography

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