“Cathedral of Lights” designed by Albert Speer for the 1934 annual Nazi Party rally in Nuremberg. To create the effect, he used 130 anti-aircraft beacons.
CHAPTER 2

"I am beginning to comprehend some of the reasons for Hitler's astounding success," wrote American journalist William L. Shirer from Berlin. "He is restoring pageantry and color and mysticism to the drab lives of twentieth-century Germans." That was written in 1934, just a year into Hitler's regime. By 1938, when our train pulled into the railroad station of Nuremberg, the party had made a fine art of staging enormous spectacles that inspired a new sense of national pride. Each September in Nuremberg, seemingly all of Germany went on a seven-day nationalistic binge that inspired the nation and stunned the rest of the world. Its fervor can be compared fairly to that of a gigantic revival meeting but without the repentance for one's sins. Quite the contrary: it was a jubilant Teutonic renaissance with the unmistakable message that Germany had regained its rightful place among the great powers of the world.

Hitler Youth Lager at Camp Langwasser, assembled for the Nuremberg Party Congress of 1938

Even for a 10-year-old, it was a near feverish, week-long high that lasted into one’s dreams. According to the meticulous planning perfected by Albert Speer, Hitler’s favorite architect who designed most of the government buildings and monuments of the Third Reich, nothing of the technical aspects of the congress was left to chance. Two months before we embarked on our special train, just one of 800 which converged on Nuremberg during that week, we had been given such detailed instructions that we knew not only our exact marching order in a Hitler Youth formation of 50,000, but each one of us had the location and number of his bunk in the huge tent city Langwasser.

Nuremberg, the medieval showcase of Germany, with its history of the Meistersinger and Albrecht Dürer, had been the site of the congress since 1927, precisely because its architecture appealed to the nationalistic instincts of all Germans. Its castle, gates and turrets were the ideal mystical backdrop for emotion-laden spectacles whose leitmotif was German greatness. But despite the unsurpassed propaganda skill of the Nazis, the enthusiasm of both spectators and participants was genuine.

Within 10 minutes of our arrival, the 1,000 delegates of our train, almost equally divided between Hitler Youth boys, SA men (brown-shirted storm troopers), and members of the SS, were on the two mile march to Camp Langwasser through the traffic-cleared streets of the narrow inner city which was a sea of flags. The sidewalks were packed with people and occasionally young women would rush up and plant a kiss on the cheeks of the marchers. Add to that the sound of dozens of bands placed at strategic locations, and you have an inkling of the overwhelming atmosphere of belonging to something majestic, which was called Deutschland. It was only the beginning. In just four days, we the Hitler Youth, would have our own meeting with the Führer. And to think that I had nearly not made it to Nuremberg at all.

The Hitler Youth delegates to the congress were carefully chosen, since they represented their home Bann, a district that often corresponded to the size of a smaller city, or in a rural area to a county. Their members, both boys and girls, might number from 3,000 to 7,000. Five Banne comprised an Oberbann with as many as 30,000 members, and the next entity was a Gebiet, an area as large as half a province with about a quarter million. My Gebiet was called Moselland 12. All in all, Germany consisted of 223 Banne, reaching into the smallest hamlet and corresponding to the political districts of the party, but far surpassing them in sheer size. Of all the Nazi organizations, the Hitler Youth was, by far, the most naively fanatic. We had no political past. Most of us looked with a good measure of disdain upon the average party member, fat and bourgeois, who usually joined to further his miserable career. Ours was the only one of the party branches with the right to address Adolf Hitler with the familiar Du, although I knew of nobody who had ever done that outside of a poem or paean to the Führer.

(Hitler knew we were essential for the future of his movement, and he instilled in us the immensely flattering conviction that we were his most trusted vassals.) There was never any Nazi spectacle, particularly after 1933, in which the formations of the Hitler Youth were not prominently featured. The Nuremberg Party Congress of 1938 had as its theme “Greater Germany.” Austria had been annexed that year with the enthusiastic approval of most Austrians, who were proud to belong to Großdeutschland.

The “Day of the Hitler Youth” fell on Saturday, September 10, and it began in the early morning with a carefully timed march into the Stadium. There was a march-past by hundreds of flag bearers and a precision presentation of sports units consisting of boys and girls, who performed intricate maneuvers which they had practiced for over a year in their home districts, often four times a week. They now fit together like a jigsaw puzzle. Their grand finale was a drill in the grandstand, spelling out the name “Adolf Hitler.”

Shortly before noon, the tension among us 80,000 lined up in rows as long as the entire stadium, each 12 boys or girls deep, tingled into our fingertips. We stood at parade rest, feet apart and left hand on our belts, facing the twin grandstands with their enormous granite swastikas below the German eagle. Suddenly, the order “Achtung!” boomed through the amplification system, which was so accurately tuned that one could hear the tick of a wristwatch in even the remotest corner of the huge field. We froze to quivering attention, but the first man who stepped into view on the speaker’s platform was not Adolf Hitler, but the Reichsführer of the Hitler Youth, Baldur von Schirach. I don’t remember anything of what he said. When Adolf Hitler was slated to speak, anyone preceding him was nearly ignored, but von Schirach was
pretty boring to begin with. He always projected warmth rather than toughness. He was something of an intellectual and a minor poet, who had written the lyrics of our Hitler Youth anthem. He was the scion of an aristocratic family and his mother was an American. Years later, at a leader's conference, he told us how proud he was that one of his ancestors had signed the Declaration of Independence. In some of his more flowery speeches, he referred to Hitler as being "God-like." He ended his short speech by introducing the Führer.

When Hitler finally appeared, we greeted him with a thundering triple "Sieg Heil," and it took all of our discipline to end it there, as we had been instructed. Hitler, the superb actor he was, always began his speeches quietly, almost conversationally man to man. He then increased both tempo and volume steadily, but occasionally returned to the slower pace, piquing his listeners for the next crescendo. It was a sure-fire method which frequently mesmerized even his bitter foes or the unbelievers. We never had a chance. I am sure none of us in that audience took our eyes off him.

Because of our size, all the very young Pimpie of the Jungvolk stood in the first row, about 40 feet from the podium. I don't recall the exact content of the speech 45 years later, but I'll never forget its emotional impact. In the first half hour, much of it was a surprisingly intimate personal statement. Here was our mighty leader, telling us quite humbly how hard his own adolescence had been, how little hope it had held, and how often he had come close to utter despair, especially after the bitter defeat of World War I. He also touched on the class distinctions of an earlier generation, which he had now obliterated for us. And then his voice rose, took on power and became rasping with a strangely appealing intensity. It touched us physically because all of its emotions were reflected on our faces. We simply became an instrument in the hands of an unsurpassed master. His right fist punctuated the air in a staccato of short, powerful jabs as he roared out a promise and an irresistible incitement because he had already proven his power to the world. "You, my youth," he shouted, with his eyes seemingly fixed only on me, "are our nation's most precious guarantee for a great future, and you are destined to be the leaders of a glorious, new order under the supremacy of National Socialism." He then paused and lifted both arms in a gesture of triumphant benediction. "You, my youth," he screamed hoarsely, "never forget that one day you will rule the world!"

One of my post-war professors, who himself became a dedicated Nazi before Hitler came to power, once explained the incredible charisma of his speeches. "Hitler's secret was that he wasn't afraid to shout out loud what most Germans were afraid of admitting to themselves, namely that we deserve to rule the world." Judging by our reaction to Hitler's speech, that may well be correct. We erupted into a frenzy of nationalistic pride that bordered on hysteria. For minutes on end, we shouted at the top of our lungs with tears streaming down our faces: "Sieg Heil, Sieg Heil, Sieg Heil!" From that moment on, I belonged to Adolf Hitler body and soul.

Hitler Youth greet the Führer on his arrival at Nuremberg
Rudolf Hess, the beetle-browed and normally taciturn but now broadly beaming "Deputy Führer," finally calmed us down long enough to end the rally with the superfluous reminder that the Führer counted on our obedience and loyalty. When we arrived back in Camp Langwasser, I found it hard to sit still. I wanted to prolong the feverish emotions aroused by the speech in the excitement of Nuremberg. But our leaders weren't keen on letting tens of thousands of charged-up Hitler Youth boys loose on the city. Nobody was permitted to leave Langwasser without a pass, including the brown-shirted storm troopers and the SS men, who by then were convinced of their elite status.

All three party organizations intermingled on the streets of Camp Langwasser, but our quarters were separated. In the Hitler Youth section, neither smoking nor drinking was permitted by anyone under 18, a rule which did not apply to the masses of Nuremberg, who consumed rivers of beer. The sexes were also strictly segregated in camp, which was no hardship in our male-dominated society.

Although nearly 700,000 uniformed members of various party organizations participated in the Congress of 1938, the largest ever, no monumental traffic jams occurred. Many formations were marched back to their trains, buses or trucks after their scheduled rallies, because even Nuremberg with its seven different arenas could not have coped with such numbers on any single day. While Hitler, for instance, spoke to us in the stadium, Air Marshal Hermann Goering addressed tens of thousands of Labor Front delegates in the Luitpold arena. But there was never a single rally without the Hitler Youth. We were the icing on the cake.

Traditionally, the last day of the Congress was reserved solely for the armed forces. On that evening, Hitler gave his most important and final speech before a selected audience of 80,000 in the Congress Hall. Millions of Germans listened to it on their radios, and the foreign press scrutinized every word. The New York Times and other large American papers printed its full text the following day, and an estimated 100 American radio stations carried it live. Although Hitler decried the oppression of the Sudetenland Germans by the Czech, he denied rumors that German troops stood ready to invade Czechoslovakia. There was no doubt that the military maneuvers of the afternoon had made a deep impression on the foreign observers, just as Hitler had calculated.

My Hitler Youth unit was among the 120,000 spectators in the grandstands of the Zeppelinwiese, and I still remember the appearance of the first modern helicopter on the field. It descended in the middle of a sham battle before Hitler's reviewing stand. I was never on the Zeppelinwiese at night, but from our camp we could hear the roar of the crowd and see the illumination by 120 Luftwaffe searchlights. It resembled, a British diplomat noted, "a vast cathedral of ice in the sky." That was an apt description. No one who ever attended a Nuremberg Reichsparteitag can forget the similarity to religious mass fervor it exuded. Its intensity frightened neutral observers but it enflamed the believers. The New York Times reporter wrote in the September 18 issue that the 1938 Congress had been "more beautiful, if not more impressive than ever." He conveyed to his readers my feeling of having witnessed an event of epic proportions, although I neither knew nor cared what the words meant. A 10-year-old does not see the world in abstract concepts, but purely in terms of personal experience. Nothing in my life, including my first communion, could rival the impact of Nuremberg.

On our last evening, we were unexpectedly visited by the Reichsjugendführer, Baldur von Schirach. The flames of a huge bonfire on the assembly center in the middle of the camp lent an air of mysticism reminiscent of ancient Teutonic festivals. It was a perfect setting for von Schirach, and hundreds of us thronged around him and the fire, spontaneously singing the songs of the Hitler Youth. Afterwards he handed out the commemoration medals of the 1938 Congress. One of my older comrades pushed me through a wall of boys and suddenly I found myself in front of the Reichsführer with my shirt hanging out of my pants. "You must be one of our youngest, Kamerad," he smiled, as he handed me the medal and shook my hand. I was so moved I almost blurted out that my grandmother had let me go only because Herr Becker had assured her it was a great honor to be selected. But I only smiled stupidly, and the Reichsführer moved on.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Count 1 (conspiracy)</th>
<th>Count 2 (waging aggressive war)</th>
<th>Count 3 (war crimes)</th>
<th>Count 4 (crimes against humanity)</th>
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### Deliberations, Verdicts, Sentences

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G: Guilty
NG: Not Guilty
O: Not accused on this count
†: Suicide by poisoning
*convicted in absentia
Hangings were carried out on October 15, 1946.