World Leaders: Adolf Hitler

By Biography.com Editors and A+E Networks, adapted by Newsela staff on 07.22.16

Word Count 884

Synopsis: Adolf Hitler was born in Austria in 1889 and became leader of the National Socialist German Workers’ Party, also known as the Nazi Party. Hitler was chancellor of Germany from 1933 to 1945, and dictator from 1934 to 1945. His policies led to World War II and the Holocaust, when millions of Jews were killed. Hitler committed suicide with his wife, Eva Braun, on April 30, 1945.

Early Years

Adolf Hitler was born in Austria, on April 20, 1889. When he was 3 years old, his family moved to Germany where he showed an early interest in German patriotism.

During World War I, Hitler served in the German army, though he was still an Austrian citizen.

Hitler was shocked by Germany’s surrender during World War I in 1918, and blamed government leaders.

After World War I, Hitler joined the German Workers’ Party (DAP) in 1919. Hitler adopted many of the anti-Jewish and nationalist ideas of the party’s founder.
The DAP changed its name to the National Socialist German Workers' Party, the Nazi party. Hitler designed the party banner, a swastika in a white circle on a red background. He became known for his hateful speeches against rival politicians, communists and Jews. In 1921, he became chairman of the Nazi party.

Hitler’s speeches began attracting followers, including Ernst Röhm, the head of the Nazi paramilitary organization, the SA. The SA protected meetings and frequently attacked political opponents.

On November 8, 1923, Hitler and the SA stormed a meeting of 3,000 people at a beer hall in Munich. Hitler announced that the national revolution had begun and declared a new government. After a short struggle including 20 deaths, their attempt to take over the government failed.

Hitler was tried for high treason and served less than a year in prison. During his incarceration, he wrote most of the first volume of "Mein Kampf" ("My Struggle"). The book laid out his plans for transforming German society into one based on race.

Rise To Power

During the Great Depression in Germany, Germans were unhappy with the government and increasingly open to extremist options. In 1932, Hitler ran for president against Paul von Hindenburg and lost with 35 percent of the vote. Hindenburg reluctantly appointed Hitler as chancellor to make Hitler’s supporters happy. Now Hitler was the second most powerful person in Germany.

Hitler formed a dictatorship, suspending basic rights and allowing imprisonment without trial. He gave his cabinet the right to make laws, even ones that deviated from the constitution.

On July 14, 1933, the Nazi Party was declared the only legal political party in Germany.

Hitler’s political enemies were rounded up and shot. Those killed included Röhm and other SA leaders who had supported Hitler but wanted more power.

The day before Hindenburg’s death in 1934, the cabinet abolished the office of president, giving its powers to the chancellor. Hitler was formally declared leader, and he immediately began to prepare for war.

Hitler also introduced social reform measures, including anti-smoking campaigns.

A main Nazi idea was the superiority of white, non-Jewish Germans, or Aryans. New laws banned marriage between non-Jewish and Jewish Germans. "Non-Aryans" were stripped of German citizenship. Nazi laws forced people with disabilities to stop having children, and Hitler later authorized a program to execute adults with disabilities.
Between 1939 and 1945, Nazis caused the deaths of 11 million to 14 million people. This included about 6 million Jews, two-thirds of Europe’s Jewish population. Deaths took place in concentration camps and through mass executions. Other persecuted groups included Poles, communists, homosexuals and Jehovah’s Witnesses, among others. Hitler probably never visited the concentration camps and never spoke publicly about the killings.

**World War II**

In 1938, Hitler reversed part of the Versailles Treaty, which had brought peace after World War I, by rebuilding Germany’s army. Hitler invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, and Britain and France declared war on Germany.

In 1940, Hitler invaded Norway, Denmark, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Belgium. Hitler bombed the United Kingdom, intending to invade. Germany formed the Axis alliance with Japan and Italy to stop the United States from supporting the British.

In 1941, Hitler invaded the Soviet Union. German troops seized an enormous area before they were stopped outside Moscow.

On December 7, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. Hitler was now at war against the world’s largest empire (Britain), the greatest financial power (the U.S.) and the largest army (the Soviet Union).

Germany’s position deteriorated along with Hitler’s health and military judgment. In late 1942, German forces were defeated at the Suez Canal in Egypt, and in Stalingrad and Kursk in the Soviet Union. On June 6, 1944, the Western Allied armies landed in northern France, taking it from Germany.

**Death And Legacy**

By early 1945, the Soviets had driven the German army back into Western Europe, and the Allies were advancing into Germany. On April 29, 1945, Hitler married Eva Braun, and the couple committed suicide the next day, afraid of being captured by enemy troops. On May 7, 1945, Germany surrendered unconditionally to the Allies.

Hitler left behind a devastated and impoverished Eastern and Central Europe. His policies inflicted great suffering and caused the death of an estimated 40 million people. Hitler’s defeat marked the end of a phase of European history dominated by Germany.