



HITLER

The Memoir of a Nazi Insider Who Turned Against the Führer

Introduction by John Willard Toland,
winner of the Pulitzer Prize

ERNST HANFSTAENGL





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Who Turned Against the Fuhrer*

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By Ernst Hanfstaengl

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Afterword by Egon Hanfstaengl



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To the Memory
of OSWALD SPENGLER
(1880-1936)

Historian, Philosopher, Patriot and Friend whose
unheeded warnings and prophecies
about Hitler became such grim reality

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AFTERWORD BY EGON HANFSTAENGL

INTRODUCTION

ERNST HANFSTAENGL was a man with two countries. His mother came from a well-known New England family, the Sedgwicks, and two of his ancestors were Civil War generals, one of whom helped carry Lincoln's coffin. In Germany two generations of Hanfstaengls had served as privy counsellors to the dukes of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha and were connoisseurs and patrons of the arts. The family owned an art-publishing house in Munich well known for its excellent reproductions.

Hanfstaengl had been brought up in an atmosphere of art and music and was himself an accomplished pianist. I have spent many hours in his Munich home listening to him play the piano with verve, his six-foot-four frame hunched over the piano, making him look like an impish bear. His nickname was Putzi (little fellow).

Adolf Hitler too had been enthralled by Putzi's music, and made him one of his closest associates in 1922. After hearing Hitler speak at a beer hall, Hanfstaengl had been fascinated by his control of the audience. "People," he wrote, "were sitting breathlessly, who had long since forgotten to reach for their beer mugs and instead were drinking in the speaker's every word." Nearby a young woman was staring at Hitler: "As though in some devotional ecstasy, she had ceased to be herself and was completely under the spell of Hitler's despotic faith in Germany's future greatness."

On the spur of the moment Putzi introduced himself. "About ninety-five percent of what you said I can set my name to, and five percent – we will have to talk about that." What he particularly objected to was Hitler's blatant anti-Semitism.

Like so many others in Germany, Hanfstaengl imagined he could control Hitler. He loaned the Führer a thousand dollars, interest free, which enabled Hitler to purchase two American rotary presses and turn his weekly Nazi newspaper into a daily. Putzi also became his foreign Press secretary.

Hitler soon became a fixture in the Hanfstaengl apartment. He fell in love with Helene Hanfstaengl and played games with her two-year-old son, Egon. He also became fascinated with Hanfstaengl's music. "Hitler dragged me around from house to house as his resident musician, and had me sit down at the piano to perform." On one occasion Putzi began playing Harvard's football marches and explained how cheerleaders and marching bands would stir up the crowd to almost hysterical mass shouting. When Hitler's interest quickened, he demonstrated on the piano how the buoyant American beat could be injected into German marches, and Hitler started parading up and down like a drum major. "This is what I need for the movement!" he exclaimed. Hanfstaengl wrote several marches in this style for the S.A. band, but his most significant contribution was the transference of Harvard's "Fight! Fight! Fight!" to "Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil!"

Hitler became even closer to the Hanfstaengls after he fled from the disastrous Beer Hall Putsch and sought refuge in their country home. Here he was captured and sent to prison; and one of the first places he visited after his release was the Hanfstaengls' new home across the Isar River. It was here the Führer came on Christmas Eve to regain his composure. First he asked Putzi to play the *Liebestod* and then he romped with Egon, marching up and down like a soldier, showing the child how to carry his little sabre and imitating the sound of an artillery barrage. Later, when

alone with Helene, he put his head in her lap and said, “If only I had someone to take care of me!” But he could never marry, he told her, because his life was dedicated to his country. “I thought he was acting like a little boy – not a lover – and perhaps he was,” recalled Helene. “It would have been awful if someone had come in. He was taking a chance, he really was. That was the end of it and I passed it off as if it had simply not happened.”

Hanfstaengl remained as Hitler’s Press secretary for years. Like many of those who had helped put Hitler in power, he thought he could stem Hitler’s excesses. But by 1936 Martin Bormann’s influence over the Führer had gained dominance, and Putzi was reduced to a minor role. For some time the Führer had been annoyed because Hanfstaengl called him “Herr Hitler” instead of “Mein Führer” and talked to him like an equal.

Hanfstaengl knew he was in danger and told Egon, now fifteen, “Things are not well. We all believed in the movement, didn’t we? I am still trying to believe in it.” But he had found corruption everywhere, and war was coming with England and America. “The country is in a foul state internally. I ascribe that mainly to the blackguards who are sitting firmly entrenched behind official desks in Berlin and elsewhere. But Hitler refuses to hear me.” And it looked as though the Führer himself had become corrupt.

Hanfstaengl warned his son that his enemies were almost sure to get around to liquidating him sooner or later. Several months later, on February 11, 1937 – Putzi’s birthday – Hitler ordered him to fly to Spain and protect the interests of German correspondents in Franco’s country. Soon after takeoff the pilot revealed that once over the area between Barcelona and Madrid, Hanfstaengl would be forced to parachute into the Red lines. That would mean death. The sympathetic pilot said nothing more, but soon one of the motors began spluttering. With a meaningful look he told Hanfstaengl that they would have to land at a small airfield.

Once on the ground, Putzi said he was going to call Berlin for instructions. Instead he phoned his secretary in Berlin, telling her that his orders had been suddenly changed and he was going to spend his fiftieth birthday with his family in Bavaria. Then he informed the pilot that the Führer had ordered him to return to Uffing. Instead he took a night train to Munich and a morning train that took him to freedom in Zurich.

The revelations in this reprint of Hanfstaengl’s classic memoir will enrich the reader’s understanding of Hitler, the twentieth-century Napoleon. Some historians have dismissed Hanfstaengl as a mountebank, but, with all his quirks, he was one of the few who ever stood up to the Führer and then lived to write about it in fascinating detail.

JOHN TOLAND

FOREWORD TO THE ORIGINAL EDITION

THE FINAL impulse that led to the compilation and publication of these memoirs I owe to Mr. Brian Connell. We met some years ago and he, while writing his own books, never lost sight of the story he thought I could tell. He came to Germany again in 1956 and discussed in detail a scheme of collaboration, to which I agreed. Our method was this: Mr. Connell spent two months in Bavaria and every day, for hours on end, took tape recordings of my discourse. His imagination and enthusiasm as an interrogator succeeded in overcoming my reluctance to dive into the sour memory of those desperate years. From these recordings and from previously compiled material of my own, he then prepared a draft manuscript, which resulted, after joint revision, in the present text. The burden of transcribing my roving reminiscences fell upon poor Mrs. Connell, to whom I therefore owe a large measure of gratitude.

I am no less indebted to my own wife, Renata, for her active help with the secretarial chores and for patiently putting up with the unending domestic upheavals that always go together with literary labours.

The story, of course, and the responsibility for it are mine, but full credit must go to Mr. Connell for having devised a relatively painless method of reducing speech to print and for having filtered out unnecessary detail.

Finally I want to pay tribute to those without whom there would have been no story: to my friends and comrades of those years – many of them no longer alive – who stuck by me, who hoped, worked and took risks, only to be cruelly disillusioned just as I was.

ERNST HANFSTAENGL
Munich
March 1957

INTRODUCTION TO THE ORIGINAL EDITION

IN THE YEARS following World War Two, as key figures of the Nazi era dropped out of the picture, firsthand accounts of that period were lost to history. It quickly became impossible to reconstruct from eyewitnesses the astonishing story of the twenty years between the two wars that brought Hitler to power and the Western world very nearly to its knees.

Those seeking to analyse the motive force of these two decades would be surprised to discover how many members of Hitler's immediate entourage survived the war years. Most of them were seedy relics, uncomfortable ghosts in dirty raincoats, haunting this or that Munich suburb: Emil Maurice, an early intimate and his first chauffeur; Hermann Esser, one of the few Party orators who could hold his own with his master; Heinrich Hoffmann, crony-photographer; Sepp Dietrich, bodyguard and later S.S. general – even one-armed Max Amann, who published *Mein Kampf* and the *Völkischer Beobachter*. In retrospect, they were all minor figures, with neither the insight nor the perception to give a coherent account of the political genius and monster in whose wake they had their being. But one survivor of the years that brought Hitler from obscurity to power was of a very different calibre – Dr. Ernst F. Sedgwick (“Putzi”) Hanfstaengl.

Hanfstaengl was a representative of that dwindling human species – a character. His appearance alone singled him out in any crowd. He was a towering six-foot-four, the thick hair on his enormous head barely specked with grey even into his seventies. The twinkling eyes above the bold nose and prognathous jaw reflected the endless stream of humorous comment and brazen *boutades* that composed his conversational fireworks. His huge hands could rend a piano in the direct tradition of the Lisztian romantics, and there were few men who dared question his judgement in matters of pictorial art. Of mixed German-American parentage and upbringing, what somehow came through was pure Celt. As he looked back on the bitterness of a life that had included nearly ten years of exile, the mobile face could assume the air of an avenging Druid.

In the little group of provincial plotters who gravitated to Hitler during the inchoate years after World War One, Hanfstaengl must have stood out like a sore thumb. He had left Germany at the height of her imperial glory to work in the United States and came back to find his country crushed and desolate. His romantic nature was fired by the incandescent promise of this almost unknown agitator, his disillusionment only completed by the triumph he had intuitively foreseen. He became the only literate member of Hitler's inner circle, and brought to this relationship far more than he ever received. When he progressed from being Hitler's window on the outside world and artistic mentor to the role of unwelcome conscience, he found himself frozen out. The process took a dozen years, but then he had to run for his life.

With his American wife, Hanfstaengl represented a new factor in Hitler's existence. The family name was one to conjure with in Munich. His father and grandfather had been welcome counsellors at the Wittelsbach and Coburg courts. They were respected pioneers in the field of art reproduction and prominent members of the Romantic movement represented by Richard Wagner and Ludwig II, the last, mad,

royal Maecenas of Bavaria. Hanfstaengl himself provided the aura of Harvard, a genuine acquaintance with past, actual, and future presidents of the United States, *entr e* not only to the best Munich and German society, but attachment to the intangible net of international social intercourse, and an artistic accomplishment which went straight to the heart of Hitler's tortured soul – the ability to play Wagner's music superbly on the piano.

To hear Hanfstaengl thunder through the crescendos of the *Meistersinger* prelude or of the *Liebestod* was an experience. The powerful fingers had, after the war, lost some of their cunning, and the associations of mood served anecdotal reminiscence rather than musical memory, but it was still possible to perceive the hold this talent had on the immature mind that Hanfstaengl had once tried to influence. For this was the impossible task that Hanfstaengl set himself in those embryonic years — to mould into some statesmanlike form the spell-binding oratorical gifts and immanent potential of Adolf Hitler.

In contrast to such provincial academicians as Dietrich Eckart and Gottfried Feder, and pseudointellectual fanatics like Rudolf Hess and Alfred Rosenberg, Hanfstaengl was the only educated man of good family and cultural background at Hitler's elbow. Hanfstaengl had lived fifteen years in the United States, remaining at liberty on parole even when America entered the war. He was deeply imbued with the latent strength of the maritime powers, and tried to wean Hitler away from the Balts who wanted revenge against Russia and the military fanatics who wanted revenge against France. His thesis was that Germany would never find equilibrium and greatness again without a rapprochement with Britain and particularly the United States, of whose incredible industrial and military potential he had been a witness. The basic premise he tried to lodge firmly in Hitler's mind was that all thoughts of settling old scores on the Continent would prove illusory if the two saltwater nations were ranged on the wrong side.

A Protestant himself, Hanfstaengl tried to restrain Hitler and his chief theorist, Rosenberg, from their campaign against the Church in predominantly Catholic Bavaria. He fought political radicalism in all its forms and, while supporting the basic objective of a national renaissance, tried to attract Hitler to the traditional values he himself represented. With countless other people of his class and type, Hanfstaengl thought Hitler could be normalized, both personally and ideologically. They were all to be disillusioned and betrayed in their turn, for failing to recognize that the basic drive of Hitler's character was not reformist but nihilist.

The Hanfstaengl household was the first to try to make Hitler socially acceptable. They introduced him to the world of art and culture, and in those early years theirs was almost the only private circle in which he found himself at ease. After the Ludendorff Putsch it was to their villa in the Bavarian alps that he fled for succor. During his prison term the Hanfstaengls provided one of the few centres of loyalty and after his release made a final attempt to inculcate in him their standards. Then there was a hiatus until, with ultimate power looming ever more certain, Hanfstaengl attempted (unsuccessfully) to apply the social and musical gifts that still attracted Hitler to divert the revolution into respectable channels before it was too late.

Hanfstaengl was a merry and amusing companion, full of charm and vitality. He

had a mocking, teasing way about him, an inextinguishable capacity for anecdotal embroidery and a total lack of inhibition in his remarks and comments. He enjoyed the licence of a Shakespearean jester, punctuating his rodomontade with tart and telling observations. Moreover, he possessed one channel to Hitler with which no one else could compete. In the exhausted pauses of the final political campaigns, often late at night, Hitler would turn to the form of relaxation that only Hanfstaengl could provide, the hour-long session on the piano that would ease Hitler's overwrought nerves and often make him receptive to Hanfstaengl's counsels of moderation.

With power in his hands, Hitler would start to dispense with the respectable front that Hanfstaengl, with his international connections, provided for the Party's heterogeneous hierarchy. Even after his personal break with Hitler at the end of 1934, and until his flight from Germany in February 1937, Hanfstaengl retained the nominal post of foreign Press chief of the N.S.D.A.P. His open opposition to the methods of the revolution and his unbridled criticisms of those responsible for them soon made him intolerable to those in power. Should he appear to protest unduly in his memoirs about his personal resistance and attitudes to the Nazi regime, there were plenty of witnesses, German and foreign, who could testify to every word and more. One story he does not tell is how at a crowded reception he called Goebbels a swine to his face. Ten further years of exile, internment, and frustration were the price he had to pay for his early idealism.

He ended his days modestly in the same house in Munich that once echoed with the voices of Hitler, Goering, Goebbels, Eva Braun and others long dead. By association and temperament he could place himself for hours in a state of total recall. Not only was he one of the best raconteurs of his time, but a superb mimic who could remember the atmosphere and tone of voice of conversations held twenty-five and thirty-five years earlier. To close one's eyes and hear Hitler thundering, Goering expostulating, and early leaders like Dietrich Eckart and Christian Weber declaiming was to undergo an experiment in time. Like his erstwhile intimate, Hanfstaengl was a master of the spoken word. Somewhere in the memoirs I have reconstituted with him, he talks of the marches and musical compositions for which he had provided the melody, relying on others to complete the orchestration. I have had the exhilarating task of orchestrating his flood of reminiscence.

As a man of true artistic temperament, he had a psychological insight into Hitler's personal character and repressions not remotely matched by anyone in constant contact with him during the formative years they were together. To the incomplete if extensive patchwork of Hitlerian biography and Nazi history he brings a conclusive picture of Hitler, the man in the making. He was able to evaluate as an intelligent intimate the neuroses that determined Hitler's megalomania. There is no record like it because no other man is or has ever been equipped to tell the story. If the question is asked what political influence Hanfstaengl had on this unbalanced demon, then the answer, ultimately, must be none. It was to Hanfstaengl's credit that he remained untainted by the regime's excesses. In the end Hitler only listened to those who pandered to his prejudices and wholly destructive passions. But as a chronicler of the process that made him what he became, Ernst Hanfstaengl was unique.

BRIAN CONNELL

Hermann Goering's letter to the author following the latter's flight to avoid assassination at the hands of the Nazi regime. See overleaf for translation.

Der Preussische Ministerpräsident.

Berlin W 8, den 19. März 1937
Erlanger Str. 8.
Telegr.: A 2 Sign 6341, 7071.

St. M.

Lieber Hanfstaengl!

Wie mir heute mitgeteilt worden ist, befindest Du Dich seit einiger Zeit in Zürich und hast die Absicht, vorläufig nicht nach Deutschland zurückzukehren.

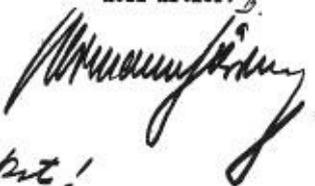
Jch nehme an, dass die Gründe hierfür auf Deinen letzten Flug von Staaken nach Wurzen i.Sa. zurückzuführen sind. Jch versichere Dir, dass die ganze Angelegenheit nur einen harmlosen Scherz darstellen sollte. Man wollte Dir wegen einiger allzu kühner Behauptungen, die Du aufgestellt hast, Gelegenheit zum Nachdenken geben. Etwas Anderes war wirklich nicht beabsichtigt.

Jch habe Oberst Bodenschatz zu Dir geschickt, der Dir persönlich noch einige Aufklärungen geben wird. Jch halte es aus verschiedenen Gründen für dringend notwendig, dass Du mit Bodenschatz sofort nach Deutschland zurückkehrst. Jch erkläre Dir ehrenwörtlich, dass Du Dich hier bei uns wie immer in aller Freiheit bewegen kannst. Lass also allen Argwohn fallen und handle vernünftig.

Mit kameradschaftlichen Grüßen

Heil Hitler!

*Habe erwartet, dass
Du meinem Wort
Glauben schenkest!*



Dear Hanfstaengl,

According to what I have been told today, you* are now in Zürich and do not intend for the time being to return to Germany.

I presume that the reason for this is your recent flight from Staaken to Wurzen in Saxony. I assure you that the whole affair was only intended as a harmless joke. We wanted to give you an opportunity of thinking over some rather over-audacious utterances you have made. Nothing more than that was intended.

I have sent Colonel Bodenschatz to you, who will give you further explanations in person. I consider it vitally necessary for various reasons that you come back to

Germany straight away with Bodenschatz. I assure you on my word of honour that you can remain here amongst us as you always have done in complete freedom. Forget your suspicions and act reasonably.

With friendly greetings,

Heil Hitler!
HERMANN GOERING

PS. I expect you to accept my word.

* The German uses the familiar, second person singular, form.

HITLER

*The Memoir of a Nazi Insider
Who Turned Against the Fuhrer*

CHAPTER I

HARVARD'S GIFT TO HITLER

The dozen years that made Hitler – My schooldays with Himmler's father – Sedgwick, Heine and Hanfstaengl forbears – Harvard and Theodore Roosevelt – Conflict on Fifth Avenue – The predictions of a German Jew – The American military attaché speaks of Hitler – Introduction to an agitator.

THE LOG-CHEST in the corner of the fireplace in my library is still covered with the traveling-rug I lent to Hitler when he was a prisoner in Landsberg. It is not a particularly hallowed memento, but a constant reminder of the dozen years of his rise to power. During that formative period I was an intimate member of his inner circle, of which I am probably the only articulate survivor. It was to my house in Munich, now laboriously regained after painful years of exile, that he came for his first meal after release from jail and where, nearly a decade later, he celebrated with Eva Braun the year of his triumph. Mine was the first Munich family of standing into which he was introduced when he was still unknown. Throughout our long association I tried to imbue him with some of the norms and ideas of civilized existence, only to be thwarted by the ignorant fanatics who were his closest cronies. I fought a running and losing battle against Rosenberg and his hazy race mystique, against Hess and Haushofer with their narrow foot-slogging misconceptions of global politics and strategy, and against the sinister and finally determining radicalism of Goebbels.

People have said I was Hitler's court jester. Certainly I used to tell him my jokes, but only to get him into the sort of mood when I hoped he would see reason. I was the only man who could hammer out *Tristan* and the *Meistersinger* to his satisfaction on the piano, and when this put him in the right frame of mind I could often enter a caveat against some more outrageous piece of behaviour on the part of one of his associates. For years he used me to give an air of respectability to his Nazi Party and when he could no longer stand my public criticism of the excesses of his new Germany he hounded me out of the country with the Gestapo on my heels.

There have been scores of books about Hitler and his era. The public records of his régime were produced at the Nuremberg trial or have appeared since in official American and British publications. I cannot hope and would not even try to compete with this massive documentation of his public career. What seems to me to be still missing is an account of the man, particularly of the development of his character during precisely those years that I knew him so well. When I met him in the early 'twenties he was a minor provincial political agitator, a frustrated ex-serviceman, awkward in a blue serge suit. He looked like a suburban hairdresser on his day off. His chief claim to notice was his golden voice and transcendent powers as an orator on the platform of one of his Party meetings. Even then, he was so little regarded that the sparse reports in the press did not even spell his name aright.

By the time of the Roehm Putsch in 1934, not long before I broke with him, he had