

## 21 Adolf Hitler

### BACKGROUND

#### Who was Hitler?

In 1939, after Germany had taken over Austria, the village of Döllersheim was wiped from the map. Its inhabitants were forcibly removed and the village destroyed by artillery and tanks. Döllersheim was the birthplace of Alois Schicklgruber, father of Adolf Hitler. In this manoeuvre, Hitler was trying to obliterate traces of his ancestry, as he feared that his grandmother may have been made pregnant by a Jew. For Hitler, obsessed with hatred of Jews, the terrible suspicion that he was one-quarter Jewish had to be suppressed.

#### Character

- Shy, awkward, moody; unable to form loving ties (due to repressive father, pampered by mother?)
- Profoundly lonely, isolated
- Contemptuous of mankind, suspicious
- Admired strength and success
- Absorbed in fantasies, became convinced he was destined to play a great role

#### General skills, abilities

- Commitment
- Tremendous energy
- Remarkable willpower
- Single-minded fanatic

#### PROPAGANDA skills

- Great orator
- Had hypnotic effect on audience
- Supreme master of psychology of mass politics
- Gift for exploiting anxiety/discontent
- Put into words what crowd longing to hear

#### Hitler's basic ideas

- Anti-semitism. The purity of German blood was being defiled by Jews. They should be excluded from Germany.
- Social Darwinism/survival of the fittest. Germans should form a *Herrenvölk* or Master Race to dominate others.
- Pan-Germanism. All Germans should join together.
- **LEBENSRAUM.** Germany must expand to take over more territory (living space) to feed her population.
- Anti-Marxism. Hostile to the ideas of Karl Marx, the German philosopher, economist and revolutionary. Marx was a non-religious Jew.
- Anti-democracy/*Führerprinzip*. Democracy provided weak government; it should be replaced by a one-party state based on the principle of an all-powerful leader.

#### Other ideas Hitler frequently expressed

- Anti-capitalism. He disliked what he called finance capitalism, i.e. the power that came from being very rich; this again was associated with Jews. He also initially criticised big business, i.e. large firms which often harmed small producers.
- Socialism. Although he hated Marxism, he spoke in favour of socialism, in the sense of stressing the needs of the national community.

**1837** Alois, Hitler's father, born to unmarried cook Maria Anna Schicklgruber. (The Jewish Frankenberger family whom she has worked for pays her an allowance for fourteen years.)

**1842** Maria Schicklgruber marries miller Johann Georg Hiedler. His brother, Johann Nepomuk, fosters Alois

**1876** Alois' birth certificate is altered to show Johann Georg Hiedler (misspelt Hitler) as his father

**1885** Alois, a customs official, marries Klara Pölzl, his third wife

**1889** Adolf Hitler born in Braunau-am-Inn, Austria

**1895** Adolf attends local choir school. Wishes to become a priest

**1903** Alois dies; freed from tight control, Adolf becomes wayward; unhappy at school in Linz, his record is poor, except in gym and art. Uses a school report as toilet paper

**1905** Leaves school with no qualifications

**1907** Goes to Vienna; fails to gain a place at Academy of Fine Arts; very upset over death of his mother

**1907-13** Drifts for six years; slums it in Vienna; lives in Jewish quarter, develops anti-semitic, anti-Marxist, anti-democratic feelings; supports PAN-GERMANISM and racism

**1913** Moves to Munich, perhaps to avoid being conscripted into the Austro-Hungarian army

**1914 Feb** Recalled to Austria, but is found medically unfit for army

**Aug** Ecstatic when war breaks out, he joins Bavarian regiment; has found real purpose in life – exemplary soldier; but only rises to corporal; is considered to lack leadership qualities

**1916 Oct** Wounded – awarded Iron Cross, Second and First Class

**1918 Oct** Gassed and then hospitalised where he hears of Germany's defeat. Hysterical at news. Feels betrayed

**1919** Employed as 'education officer' (that is, a spy) by Bavarian army's political section

**Sept** Goes to a German Workers' Party (DAP) meeting and joins; becomes a committee member

**1920 Feb** With DAP leader Drexler, draws up Twenty-five Point Programme; party name changed to NSDAP. His powerful speeches help build up membership

**1921 Jul** Becomes chairman and Führer after he threatens to resign

**Aug** Sets up the SA

**1922 Jan** Is let off leniently after being convicted of breaking up a meeting

### Hitler's family tree

