

# MODERN HISTORY

## Albert Speer 1905-1981

---

### BACKGROUND

#### Family Background and Education:

- Born March **1905** into a wealthy family-Father was a Architect
- Mother was independently wealthy and among the social elite of Germany-Speer believed he was from a upper middle class family→In fact he wasn't [modest]
- Middle child, second of three sons
- Extremely poor relationship with his parents→felt he was rarely shown love
- Affectionate towards his governess whom he befriended
- Not allowed to play in the streets with lower class people
- Speer felt inferior to his brothers, believed they considered him inferior and such was bullied by them
- Before he was old enough to attend school his play mates were of the concierge
- 9 when WWI began, wealth of family enabled them to buy food during poor economic times
- Was described as a sickly weak boy→often had dizzy spells and fainted

#### 'A weakness of the vascular nerve'

- Speers illness gave him the ability to deal with problems and difficult people
- Spent copious amounts of time at his parents' holiday house doing physical activity to improve his health
- At 17 Speer meet Margarete Weber→fell in love
- Parents objected to such a relationship with a women of a lower class
- 18 left school with high marks
- Passion for math, father discouraged him→Architecture, following fathers wish [shows obedience to authority figures]

#### **1923**

- Studied Architecture at the Institute of Technology Karlsruhe

## **1924**

- Transferred to Institute of Munich

### **'Not interested in Hitler or His Political Party'**

- Father gave Speer an allowance of 300 marks a month

## **1926**

- Transferred to Institute of Technology Berlin→studied under Professor Tessenow
- Completed studies, given position as Professor Tessenow's assistant at age 23
- Unable to find work→worked with his father
- While studying Speer met Rudolf Walters→loyalist friend whom kept detailed chronicles of Speers work.

## **1928**

- Married Margarete Weber

### **'Married today, Love Albert and Gretel'**

#### **Introduction to the Nazi party and his reasons for joining the Nazi party:**

- Worked at an Institute that was the centre for both Nazi and Communist Political rallies
- Claimed to be disinterested in politics

### **'I was allergic to any political commitments'**

- Speers student during class often had political debates with him, of which he always lost

## **December 1930**

- Speers students convinced him to attend a Nazi meeting on campus of which a number of Professors were present.
- Weeks later Speers friends took him to a Political speech by Joseph Goebbles
- Goebbles could understand the feelings of ordinary Germans
- After meeting mounted police forced the crowds into the streets
- Speer felt sympathy towards the crowd a opposed the authorities

## **March 1931**

- Speer joined the Nazi Party-came completely under the influence of Hitler and his persuasive speaking ability
- Speer was 'Hypnotised', claiming to be deeply affected, not only with Hitler's proposed policies but of the man himself-Speers first impressions *Inside the Third Reich*

- Made a almost hypnotic impression
- Joined Nazi party without any research
- Aware of a number of 'rough' spots in the party's doctrine
- Believe Germany had a choice between either Communities or the Nazi parties
- While Hitler began to gain more power, he became more moderate and respectable
- Hitler's alliance with old style nationalists changed his extremist attitude
- Speer stated that if he had known of what Hitler had intended to, start a world war, kill Jews and political oppositions and many others, he would have resigned

## **RISE TO PROMINANCE**

### **Early Work for the Nazi Party:**

- Speers only contribution to the Nazi party was to drive members in his car on official business
- regarded the Nazi party as:

#### **'A Vehicle through which to achieve his ambitions'**

- Surprised by the low level of intellect in the Nazi party
- Befriended Karl Hanke upon meeting him at the Nazi HQ
- Hanke assisted Speer greatly with his career, was a key support and loyal friend
- Hanke was considered Speers best friend at the end of the war

### **September 1930**

- Hanke offered Speer the task of redecorating Nazi party HQ on a unpaid basis

### **July 1932**

- Hanke now organiser of Berlin district, offered Speer a job of redecorating Propaganda Ministers HQ [Joseph Goebbles]

#### **'Luckiest turning point of my life'**

- Hitler inspected Speers work and was impressed with the finished product, making a good name and impression on Hitler

### **1933**

- Hitler appointed as chancellor → did not affect Speer

### **March 1933**

- Hanke commissioned Speer once again to redecorate Goebbles new ministry building → Goebbles disliked Speers work

- Speer redesigned the 1<sup>st</sup> May day rally, which was later accepted

***'I had moved a step forward'***

### **July 1933**

- Speer given the assignment to design the First Nazi party rally at Nuremberg → Hitler approved the plans without talking to Speer

### **1933**

- Paul Troost, commissioned by Hitler to refurbish the Chancellors residence in Berlin, Hitler remembered Speers work on Goebbles HQ and appointed Speer, Troost assistant personally. Hitler became extremely interested in the work.
- Hitler visited the work site almost daily with Speer accompanying Hitler on his tours.
- Speer now had regular contact with Hitler → invited to dinners, building a friendship
- Speer was made 'Commissioner for the artistic and technical presentation of party rallies and presentations' by Hitler

### **1934**

- Speer was given his first major commission → design a permanent site for the Nuremberg rallies at the Zeppelin field. [one of Speers most impressive productions]
- The **1934** Nuremberg rally was known as the cathedral of lights, filmed by Leni Riefenstahl in 'Triumph of the Will'

### **Appointment as 'First Architect of the Reich'**

- From **1933** Speer was in constant contact with Hitler

**'Hitler had no doubt taken a special liking to me'**

- It was important for Speer to be with Hitler in order to raise his prestige and to remain aware of the goings on of the Nazi party and what Hitler was thinking
- Speer had unlimited access to Hitler and the Chancellery building in Berlin

**'If Hitler had actually had friends, I would have certainly been one of his closes friends'**

### **January 1934**

- Paul Troost died
- At 28 Speer became Hitler's personal Architect
- Majority of Speers work was accepted with a simple 'Agreed' from Hitler
- As First Architect of the Reich Speer was responsible for:
  - Building a permanent Nuremberg rally site

→ Designing huge complex's, fields, stadiums and halls

- Relationship with Hitler became tighter
- Worked with Robert Ley, Head of Labour Front, to improve presentation of factories and mines

### **1936**

- Hitler gave Speer his greatest architectural assignment, 'to completely rebuild the city of Berlin'  
→ 'Germania' project – plans to be complete by 1937

### **January 30<sup>th</sup> 1937**

- Hitler appointed Speer the title of 'Inspector General of the construction for the Reich Capital' [GBI], as such Speer was Hitler's direct subordinate being exempt from having to inform Government of Berlin or Nazi party of his plans. Other Nazi leaders had no control over him

### **1937**

- Designed German pavilion for Paris World Fair

### **1938**

- Given task of building new Chancellery – Hitler impressed by Speers ability to complete the building two days ahead of schedule

## **The 'Germania' project and New Reich Chancellery**

### **The Germania Project:**

### **1936**

- Hitler assigns Speer to completely rebuild Germany, later known as the 'Germania' Project
- Model for the plans were complete by **1937**

### **January 30<sup>th</sup> 1937**

- Hitler appointed Speer the title of 'Inspector General of the construction for the Reich Capital' [GBI], as such Speer was Hitler's direct subordinate being exempt from having to inform Government of Berlin or Nazi party of his plans. Other Nazi leaders had no control over him
- Required the removal and demolition of 50000 apartments near the city centre, 23000 of which were occupied by Jews

### **April 1937**

→ Law concerning the rental situation of the Jews

- Allowed Jews to be evicted for any complaint or conflict
- Power to remove Jewish tenants was given to Speers office, which passed it onto the SS

- Speers design for 'Germania' included:
  - Monolithically huge buildings in comparison to great buildings of the world
  - Grand Avenue
  - Massive Arch of Triumph and the end of the Grand Avenue [engraved with 180 000 dead WWI soldiers names]
  - Great Hall

### **Reich Chancellery:**

- Arguably Speers greatest architectural achievement → awarded Gold Party Badge for his work

### **January 1938**

- Appointed by Adolf Hitler to design/build new Reich Chancellery, project expected to be finished by **January 1939**
- Speers organisational skills made this possible, finishing two days ahead of schedule
- Aim of Chancellery was to impress and overwhelm diplomats and overseas leaders with the power and magnificent of the Third Reich

***Adolf Hitler 'When anyone man enters the Third Reich Chancellery, he should feel that he is visiting the ruler of the whole world'***

- Chancellery had an underground air-raid shelter
- Required 8000 labourer, builders and craftsmen working two shifts

### ***Work as Armaments Minister***

### **February 13<sup>th</sup> 1942**

- Fritz Todt died in a mysterious plane crash after he suggested to Hitler that Germany may not win the war
- Speer appointed Minister for Armaments and Munitions and appointed Director of Organization Todt
- Assume his position, responsibilities and increase munitions production [significantly increased gun, tank and ammunition production]
- This involved the Four Year Plan, preparing Germanys industries and economy for war
- Created the central planning board to coordinate production and increase productivity
- Toured Mauthausen concentration camp in **1943**, expressing his concern for the wasted materials used for prisoners housing
- Hitler constantly overruled Speer in the armaments industry
- Various new weapons introduced [Tanks and V2 rockets **1944**]

- Workforce initially made up of the German Labour Service, eventually conscripted into the army

#### **Foreign labour:**

- From European occupied territories
- Used rather than women for labour

#### **Concentration camp prisoners:**

- **September 1942**, Speer claims to have asked the SS to improve conditions for the workers
- many Jewish prisoners taken to death camps

#### **Prisoners of war:**

- **1943** – mainly Russians used as labour force
- Speer complained that not enough of the POW's were being used in the labour force
- In **1944** Hitler ordered all armaments production be moved underground so it could continue despite Allied bombing
- Dora concentration camp was born into the tunnels of an old mine

**“the requirements of the German economy as a whole must be subordinate to the necessities of armaments production”**

- Historians conclude that Speer's efforts prolonged the Nazi war effort for two extra years

## **SIGNIFICANCE AND EVALUATION**

#### **Relationship with Hitler**

- Speer's career as both an Architect and Minister was entirely dependent on his relationship with Hitler.

#### **Professionally:**

- At first Speers and Hitler's relationship was limited to a common love for architecture
- Under Hitler, Speer's career could blossom. As a result Speer became part of Hitler's inner circle
- Speer received invitations to Hitler's house in the mountains and often ate dinner with him at the Chancellery
- By **1935** Speer had his own house in the mountains
- Through the years leading to **1942**, Speer and Hitler's relationship tightened → with Speer having regular contact with Hitler

### **Power play within the Nazi Regime:**

- Speers relationship with Hitler began to deteriorate, as Speer climbed the Nazi ladder
- Due to Speers political rivals, Speers hospital stint and Hitler's physiological decay

### **1942**

- Speer became a minister, development of a formal relationship→Hitler began to overthrow Speers wishes

### **1943**

- Hitler gains armament information from Karl Saur [Speers department head] instead of Speer personally

### **1944**

- Speers hospitalization resulted in his removal from Hitler's inner circle

### **1944/45**

- Speer actively disobeys Hitler→most noticeably Speers reaction to Hitler's Scorched Earth Policy

### **Personal Relationship with Hitler:**

- Historians argue the Speer/Hitler relationship had a deep emotional element

### **Fest 'For Speer as much as for Hitler was the only 'Affair of the heart' of their lives'**

- This is evident through:
  - Hitler's leniency towards Speers frequent acts of disobedience
  - Speers emotional connection with Hitler prevented him from deserting Hitler even when the criminal nature of the regime was revealed
  - Speer visited Hitler one last time in his bunker in the dying days of WWII

### **Involvement with anti-Semitic activities in connection with the 'Germania' project – The question of the Jewish flats**

- The 'Germania' project required the demolition of 50000 apartments near the city centre
- During Speers involvement with the project, Speer was responsible for forced deportation of Jews.
- Evicted Jews from their homes to make room for displaced Germans due to the 'Germania' project
- Claim to have been unaware of the Holocaust are not credible→beings of concentration camps creation of the main resettlement division



- Speers department identified apartments rented by Jews in Berlin→evicted and giving to Germans who's apartments were demolished
- 'Law concerning the rental situation of Jews 1937'

Chronicles stated:

### **November 1941**

- 4000 Jews evicted and sent to camps

### **February 1939-October 1942**

- 75000 Jews removed from their houses
- There for no direct involvement, however had to have knowledge
- Speer maintain he was not Anti-Semitic, this may be true, but Speer was a man without emotions

**Gitta Sereny 'When Speer wanted something, he went after it, and the human cost did not matter'**

### **Use and Abuse of forced labour**

- Speers influence and position within the armament and building industry  
→ linked to the atrocities committed against the Jews and Prisoners of War
- Placed Germany in violation of Geneva Convention
- Jews and POWs worked in weapons factories→1944 400000 worked as slaves
- Terrible conditions, 1-3 died from overwork/malnutrition
- Factories mad from abandoned mines and train tunnels [Dora concentration camp]
- Forced to work 18hour days with little food and water
- At its peak the German industry used 7million forced labourers
- Nuremberg trials Speer found guilty of counts 3 and 4, War crimes against humanity  
→Speer attended a conference involving the extension of the slave labour program  
→1942 conference – labourers would be brought by force to satisfy industry needs  
→Speer demanded labourers from specific countries and refused to use women

**Albert Speer 'A further million Russian labourers for the German armaments industry' –**

**'There is nothing to be said against the SS and Police taking drastic steps and putting those known as slackers into concentration camps'**

- Involvement in slave labour program resulted in a sentence of 20 years in Spandau prison

### **Knowledge and links with the concentration camp system**

- Speer claims he didn't know of the poor conditions in which the labourers were kept
- However Speer was noted to have visited the Dora camp in **1943**
- Given reports from factory managers about conditions
  - claimed to have instructed SS to improve the conditions

### **'A healthy prisoner makes a more efficient worker'**

GBI needed stone for construction of 'Germania', as a result quarry camps set up to supply GBI

### **1943**

- GBI established its own camp able of processing 1500 workers daily
- Development of new technologies 'V2 rockets' → Dora concentration camp born within abandoned mines
- Horrendous conditions, underground, dark, inadequate food, heating and medical
- 60000 sent over half died

### **December 1943**

- Speer visits Dora again → no changes
- Advisers visit Auschwitz, Speer wrote to Himmler stating he would provide material for its expansion
- Visited Mauthausen concentration camp and was appalled at the '**wasted materials**' being used for prisoners
- After numerous visits to camps Speer could have no doubt of the concentration camp system and what Nazi rule meant to be conquered and captured

### **Reaction to Hitler's 'Scorched earth' policy in 1945**

- Policy was created when Hitler realised he could not win the war [impending defeat in **1945**]
- German industries were to be destroyed, leaving nothing of value for invading countries

### **August 1945**

- Speer wrote to Hitler stating the war could not be won
- In Speers memoirs, he could not accept such a policy
  - Germany would need the infrastructure following the war

- Speer disobeyed and undermined Hitler's orders, convincing Nazi district leaders and factory managers to disobey the policy and not comply with Hitler's orders
- Persuaded leaders to preserve transport and industry for the time after Hitler

### **Adolf Hitler 'You pressed them not to carry out my orders and declared that the war was lost'**

- No relationship between Speer and Hitler → considered killing him
- Speer convinced Hitler to introduce a new decree and to entrust him with the implementation of the policy

### **April 1945**

- Hitler issued his final decree which called for only a temporarily crippling of industry, transport and communications

### **The significance of Speer's work as Minister for Armaments and the War Production to the overall German war effort**

- Speer played an important role in Germany's war effort particularly in the later part of WWII.
- Speer was in support of the notion of total war (mobilizing the economy to the fullest so the armed forces would receive a plentiful supply of weapons).
- His exceptional organizational skills allowed him to effectively deal with three core issues: the vast inefficiencies of the industry, the need to increase war production despite declining availability of raw materials and labour shortages.
- He established the Main committees and rings (Main committees represented the different types of weaponry to be produced while the Rings represented raw materials and parts needed to produce these weapons).
- Under Speer each factory produced only one weapon at a time – this led to a more efficient and consequently productive industry.

### **April 1942**

- Speer set up the Central Planning Board (Purpose: to coordinate armaments design and production for the army, navy and air force).
- Speer acquired a greater understanding of the needs of the armed forces as he regularly visited the German troops at the front in Southern Russia. Here he assessed whether or not the armament allocation and production was adequate - gained practical knowledge.
- Speer's efforts to disperse factories to avoid the destruction of industry through bombing raids was successful in increasing the efficiency of the German war effort. In the last two years of the war the Allies bombed German industries and factories heavily, however Speer's dispersion of factory locations ensured that despite the fact that one million tonnes of bombs were dropped in Germany, production still increased significantly.
- To fulfil his interpretation of total war, Speer pushed for the employment of women in the workforce. Although Hitler rebutted this push ideologically, during the war 50% of women rejoined the workforce making up 47% of employees.

- Speer made use of new technology. Speer made use of machine tools for producing/assembling air craft and tanks 4 fewer skilled workers were needed, allowing for more extensive use of slave labour and POWs.
- Speer was prepared to be ruthless in order to meet production goals.

### **1943**

- Speer wrote to Himmler about the need for stricter discipline in the workplace. He demanded undisciplined POWs or foreign workers to be executed.
- Speer introduced much tighter controls over distribution so that more could be produced using the same allocation of raw materials.
- By 1944 factories were able to produce fighter aircraft using 25% less raw materials.
- Speer made a significant contribution to the war effort by his ability to increase war production (which arguably allowed Germany to continue fighting for a further two years).
- Within 6 months as Minister Of Armaments, armaments production increased by 97%, tanks by 25% and planes by 30%.
- Speer was also the driving force behind the German economy; by **1944** he was responsible for the entire German economy, with 14 million works under his direction.

**Allan Bullock ‘without Speer, Hitler would have lacked the power to stage his fight to the finish’**

**Evaluation: for example, the ‘Good Nazi’?**

Was Speer the good Nazi?

→ The connotation of the word ‘Nazi’ is a highly emotive one, and is automatically suggestive of guilt. There is really no such thing as the ‘Good’ Nazi, but the question more rests on whether Speer was a BETTER Nazi than the other highly ranked officials

### **YES:**

During the Nuremberg Trials Speer presented himself as a mere technocrat in Hitler’s war machine.

**His role as Nazi Architect was a form of Nazi propaganda:** Speer carried out the grand visions of Hitler to convince Germans that the Nazi regime was going to be as great as the ancient civilisations, gain popularity for the Nazi Party→ultimately following orders and doing his job.

**Slave labour:** Speer did resort to slave labour in the interests of productivity and efficiency, wider context→war time, desperate times call for desperate measures for the betterment of the Nazi state.

**Scorched Earth Policy:** Speer wasn’t entirely subservient to Hitler. In fact Speer publicly expressed his disagreement and even used his power to persuade key officials from carrying out Hitler’s orders.

**Fear of execution or dismissal:** If Speer did not fulfil Hitler’s orders he would have been dismissed or executed. In this instance he would have no doubt been replaced with someone who would have carried out the job more ruthlessly→ultimately Speer claims he wasn’t left with much choice.

**Showed remorse:** Speer in contrast to most of the other Nazi leaders at the Nuremberg Trials, that denied, responsibility of war crimes, Speer showed remorseful attitude and admitted his guilt.

**Extremely Successful Minister of Munitions:** If Speer had been lacking in his amorality his contribution to the Nazi war effort would have been ineffective and fruitless.

### NO:

**Slave Labour:** Speer constructions before the war called for large amounts of stone and thus the SS officers responded to violence and malnutrition of camp prisoners, to fulfil Speer's orders

**Jew-Flats:** Re-designing Berlin and other major cities → 75000 Jews evicted  
→ making him one of the real criminals of Nazi Germany

**Gitta Sereny 'When he needed something he went after it irrespective of people's lives'**

**Used Jew-Flats for personal financial gain:** Speer accepted a considerable sum of money from a fund at Goering's disposal, in order to buy property not far from Berlin. In 1982 it was proved that Speer was anxious to profit from the forcible eviction of Jewish owned apartments in Berlin

### November 1940

**'How is the action for the clearance of those thousand Jewish flats going'**

**Anti-Semitic:** Speer had stage managed the annual Nuremberg rallies which vilified and outlawed Jews

**Deliberate Remorse:** Historians suggest Speer's confessions at Nuremberg were not genuine but rather deliberately planned and calculated to avoid the death penalty

**Knowledge of Holocaust:** During the Nuremberg trials Speer claimed to have had no knowledge of the Holocaust, many sources suggest otherwise

→ Speer had knowledge about the final solution since **1943**, he attended a conference at Posen which discussed aspects of the final solution

→ Speer would have frequently listened to Hitler's radical racist ranting, a central program of Hitler's

→ Walter Chronicle – outlines actions taken by Speer's ministry to evict Jews from Berlin → feeding concentration camps