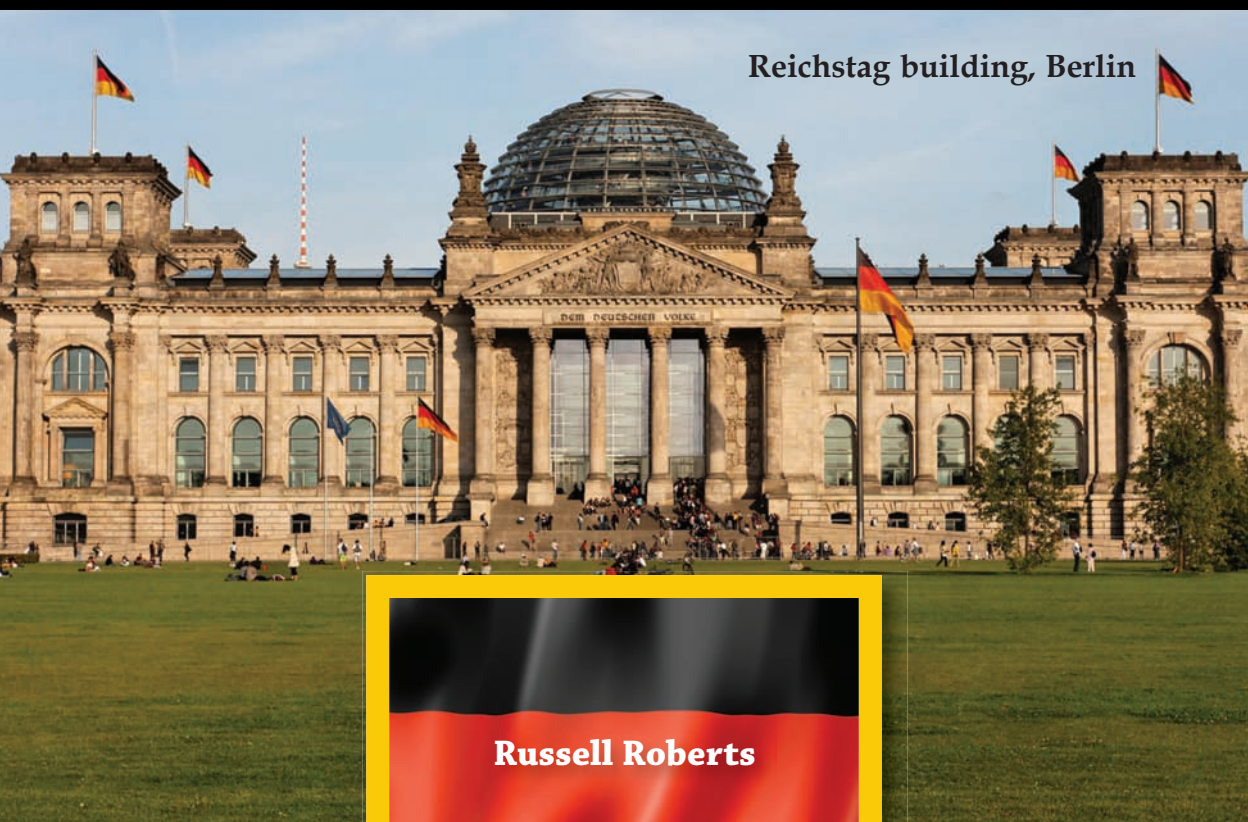




The Evolution of Government and Politics in

GERMANY

GERMANY



Reichstag building, Berlin

Russell Roberts

Mitchell Lane
PUBLISHERS

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The Evolution of Government and Politics in

CHINA
EGYPT
FRANCE
GERMANY
GREECE
IRAQ
ITALY
NORTH AND SOUTH KOREA
THE UNITED KINGDOM
VENEZUELA

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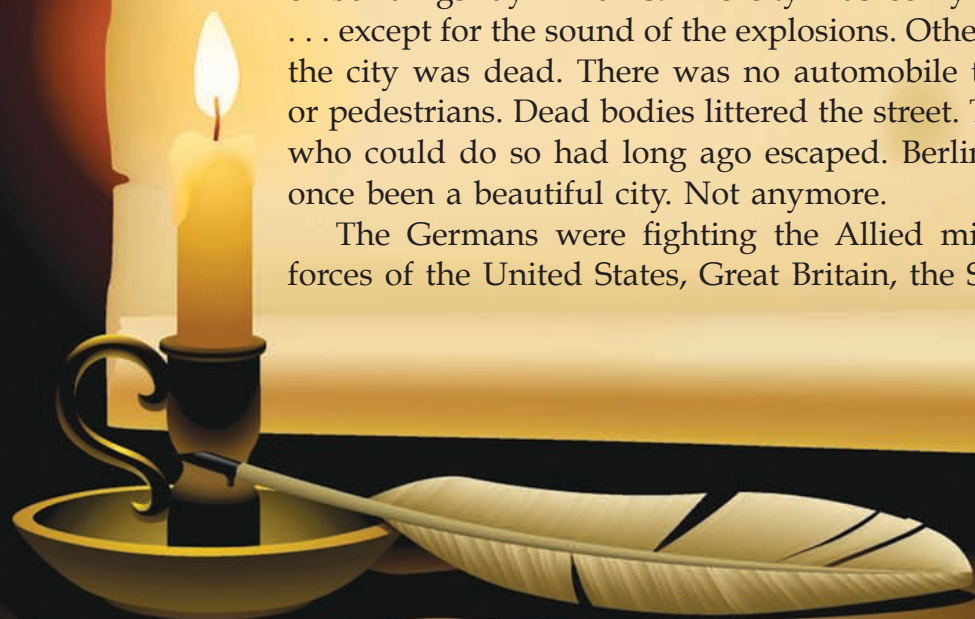
CHAPTER 1

Fiery End

The bombs slammed into the ground, shaking it like an earthquake and sending clouds of dirt and debris flying into the air. There was no let-up; bomb after bomb repeatedly struck the ground, released by squadrons of hundreds of airplanes flying overhead. People huddled in their shattered homes, hoping that the next bomb wouldn't land directly on top of them. Each blast made their homes shake, unleashing puffs of plaster and paint that choked the air like smoke.

This was Berlin, Germany, during the final months of World War II. The capital city of Germany was a bombed-out, desolate wasteland. Hundreds of buildings lay in ruins. The city was eerily quiet . . . except for the sound of the explosions. Otherwise the city was dead. There was no automobile traffic or pedestrians. Dead bodies littered the street. Those who could do so had long ago escaped. Berlin had once been a beautiful city. Not anymore.

The Germans were fighting the Allied military forces of the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet





Bombs falling during an American bombing raid over Germany in 1942. The airplane below the bomb has had part of its tail shot away and almost certainly will crash.

Union, and other countries in the bloody conflict called World War II. Now, in mid-April 1945, no more bombs were falling. Instead, a new horror awaited the citizens of Berlin. The massed forces of the Soviet Union were poised to attack. Millions of soldiers and thousands of cannons and tanks were about to wreak even more death and destruction on Berlin.

Huddled in an underground bunker amidst the rubble was Germany's leader Adolf Hitler. He was the head of the National Socialist German Workers' Party, or the Nazi Party as it was commonly known. He had begun the war in September 1939.



CHAPTER 1

Initially German forces had been very successful. However, beginning in June 1941 with an ill-conceived invasion of the Soviet Union, the tide had begun to turn against Germany. Now the Allies were on the brink of defeating Hitler and Germany.

Yet even as it had been obvious for months that the war was lost, the German people refused to give up. "It's certainly unusual for a country to continue fighting to the point of complete self-destruction," said historian Ian Kershaw.¹

Their world was being destroyed around them, but in some respects Germany's politics and government went on as if nothing was the matter. Until just a few months ago, applications for building permits were still being submitted and approved, as if the war would soon go away and rebuilding could begin.

The postal system provided an example of how Germans stubbornly made their government work despite the war. When trains couldn't run anymore because the rail network had been destroyed, motorcycles delivered the mail. When a lack of gasoline prevented motorcycles from running, the postal service switched to bicycles. When bicycles couldn't be used anymore, postal carriers walked great distances.

German government . . . functioning until the end.

How had it come to this? How had German politics and government contributed to their country being involved in such a destructive conflict?

Their choice for a leader was partly responsible. Hitler had cleverly used the dissatisfaction of the German people with the Treaty of Versailles that ended World War I to help him and his Nazi party rise to power. In the years immediately following the war, the political system in Germany had been the Weimar Republic, a democracy. However, Germany, which had been a

Adolf Hitler was born in Austria and grew up there.





As a youth, Hitler tried to enter an art school in Vienna, Austria, but was rejected twice.



unified country only since 1871, had little experience with democracy. Add to that the devastating effects of the worldwide economic depression that began in 1929, and the huge financial burden that the Allies forced Germany to assume for allegedly starting World War I, and the Weimar Republic was in trouble. It only took one political leader to take advantage of the unstable situation.

That was Hitler. He denounced the Treaty of Versailles and promised better days for Germany. This was music to the ears of Germans. In 1933, Hitler was elected chancellor of the country, second in power to Paul von Hindenburg, the country's aging and ineffectual president. When Hindenburg died the next year, the German people voted overwhelmingly to allow Hitler to combine the offices of president and chancellor. He called himself the Führer, meaning "leader," but in reality he was a dictator. Opposing political parties vanished, their leaders arrested and/or killed. The Nazis were the undisputed masters of German politics and government. For the next 11 years Hitler ruled Germany with an iron fist.

Hitler built up Germany's armed forces—in defiance of the Treaty of Versailles—and in September 1939, he launched World War II by invading Poland. Less than six years later, with the Soviet army closing in, Hitler killed himself. Germany surrendered a few days later.

Hitler served in the German Army in World War I as a corporal. He was wounded and received a medal for bravery.





CHAPTER 1



Adolf Hitler rides with German President Paul Von Hindenburg. When von Hindenburg died in 1934, Hitler became the most powerful political figure in Germany.

More than six million Germans had died in the war. Berlin was smashed to rubble; no more than one in four houses was fit to live in. Rats ran through the streets. Decomposing bodies lay under piles of debris. Police and fire protection were virtually non-existent. Other German cities were in a similar state.

Little did the German people know that the end of the war would bring more sweeping changes than ever before to the country's politics and government.

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