

Hess, Rudolf

(1894--1987), Nazi leader and close aide to Adolf Hitler.

During World War I Hess served in the army as an infantry officer and later as a pilot. He was among the first to join the Nazi Party in 1920. In November 1923 Hess joined Hitler in his unsuccessful bid to take over the Bavarian government. As punishment, he was imprisoned along with Hitler in Landsberg Prison. During their time there, Hess took dictation for and edited Hitler's book, *Mein Kampf*.

When they were let out of jail in 1925, Hess became Hitler's personal aide and private secretary. He held those posts until Hitler rose to power in January 1933. At that point, Hess was appointed deputy leader of the Nazi Party. He later served as a cabinet minister, and signed all laws passed by the Nazi regime.

As a dependable aide, Hitler trusted Hess with the execution of several important missions concerning Germany's annexation of Austria (*Anschluss*) and the Sudeten region of Czechoslovakia. However, he was soon appointed to the Secret Cabinet Council and Reich Ministerial Defense Council, committees with little power or influence. Hess believed that he was being cut out of the loop. This might have been his motivation for flying to England in May 1941, to convince British leaders that peace was possible with Germany. It is not known whether Hess undertook this mission alone, or was influenced to do so by Hitler. In any case, Hess was arrested as soon as he reached England, and Hitler denied any involvement. Hess was held in England until the end of the war.

Afterwards, Hess was trialed at the main Nuremberg Trial. In October 1946 he was acquitted of crimes against humanity and war crimes, but was found guilty of crimes against peace. He was sentenced to life imprisonment, despite the demands of the Soviet judge, who wanted Hess executed. Hess was incarcerated in the Spandau Prison in West Berlin, under the joint authority of the United States, Great Britain, Soviet Union, and France. For years, Hess was the only prisoner at Spandau. He committed suicide in 1987.

