With Adolf Hitler in Paris

Translation with commentary by Carolyn Yeager and Wilhelm Mann


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Translators' Introduction:

Through the decades since 1939, historians and writers from varied political persuasions - some with questionable reputations, many with questionable research - have characterized Adolf Hitler in a full range of negatives: ignorant, unstable, grandiose; psychopathic; suffering from illnesses that affected his brain; a sexual pervert; a self-hating part-Jew; a life failure seeking to extract revenge on a society that rejected him. The dark characterizations of the German Fuehrer by these people seem to know no bounds, nor any shred of balance or decency.

Did a different Hitler exist? Can we find credible evidence that can correct the propaganda of these pseudo historians? And what evidence would it be that would convince the average man and woman that Adolf Hitler’s goal was not world domination and enslavement, but to establish justice and fairness for Germans and to build a great German nation within a unified, anti-communist Europe?
There have been many who knew him and were close to him, some on a daily basis – who wrote books telling quite a different tale. Nicolaus von Below, Hitler’s Luftwaffe adjutant from 1937 to 1945 (At Hitler’s Side, 2001), wrote that Hitler was neither arrogant nor stubborn, but could be persuaded to change his mind if given clear and reasoned arguments.

Among others who were with Hitler to the end, and lived to write about it, were Hans Bauer, his personal pilot (I Flew with the Mighty of the World, 1957); Rochus Misch, his bodyguard (The Last Witness, 2008); two of Hitler’s secretaries: Christa Schroeder (He was my Chief, 1985) and Traudl Junge (Until the Final Hour, 2002). All described an Adolf Hitler who was a considerate, correct and even kind employer, with a calm and agreeable personality, who seldom if ever raised his voice. None of these witnesses had any reason to lie; in fact they had every reason to say otherwise, as they have all been accused of stating falsehoods or being in denial by the gatekeepers of politically correct history.

In addition to these sources that tell of "Hitler the Employer," there is a little-known book published in German in 1982 by Hermann Giesler, Adolf Hitler’s trusted architect and confidant, which reveals a man we can call “Hitler the Artist.” As a student of the arts and architecture, Adolf Hitler became vitally concerned with the planning and building of cities. We meet a man whose ideas were wide-ranging and constructive, whose knowledge of architecture was vast, and whose taste was cultured.

In his fascinating book, Ein Anderer Hitler, Giesler gives us an account of his own personal exchanges with the Fuehrer concerning sweeping architectural plans for the cities of Grossdeutschland (Greater Germany) – Berlin, Munich and Linz – along with some intimate insights into the Fuehrer’s psychology. This article will limit itself to the chapter titled “With Adolf Hitler in Paris,” an eye-witness description of Hitler’s famous visit to Paris on the eve of the armistice between France and Germany, after the German victory of the Battle of France.

Giesler begins when he was stopped by a police detail on June 22, 1940 when on his way to a building site near Vienna, and told to drive to the Vienna airport. There, he boarded a Ju 52 courier airplane which landed on an airstrip in northern France, after which a land rover drove him to Adolf Hitler’s headquarters at Bruly de Peche, north of Sedan. The armistice was set to begin the following day at midnight. When face to face, Hitler lost no time in commenting to Giesler upon his victory and his desire to see Paris without further delay.

“All right, Giesler, at that time you could not know it, but I was sure of my strategic concept, the necessary tactical details, and my confidence in the fighting power of the German forces. Out of it, the carefully planned timetable developed naturally. I remembered that during the winter I invited you to go with me to Paris; I’ve asked Breker and Speer to come along. With my artists, I want to look at Paris. We will take off early in the morning.”
Arno Breker was Hitler's favorite sculptor, and Albert Speer his other trusted architect. That evening, Hitler, his military staff and aides-de-camp, along with the three artists, had a simple dinner together at two long tables in a primitive hut. Giesler makes a special point of telling us:

There was no triumphant attitude, no loud voices—only serious dignity. The faces of the responsible leaders still wore the stress of the past weeks. I considered myself unworthy of the reward of sitting with them.

They left at 4 a.m. in the Fuehrer airplane and landed at Le Bourget airport, still in darkness, where open cars awaited them. Speer, Breker and Giesler, along with the SS Adjutant Schaub and the ordinance officer, Colonel Speidel, joined Adolf Hitler in his car. Giesler writes:

The former military attache in Paris drove ahead of us as pilot and silent mentor. With our dimmed lights we could only see the contours of the buildings. We passed barricades—the guards stepped out and saluted; one could sense armistice was not completely at work. Adolf Hitler was sitting in front of me and I recalled the past winter evening when he talked about Paris, his confidence that he would see the city soon. Now his wish was being realized. But he did not arrive in Paris as the Supreme Commander of the German Wehrmacht—he arrived as the “Bauherr” (construction boss) of German cities which he already visualized with their new faces. He came here to compare architecture, to experience the atmosphere of the city in the company of his two architects and one sculptor, even though escorted by a military entourage—soldiers which surely had earned the privilege to see the capital of France with him.

*Hitler party enters the Paris Opera*
Giesler had the impression that the itinerary was carefully planned. Their first destination was the Imperial Opera House, designed by the architect Garnier. Since Hitler wanted to see the façade in bright sunlight, they immediately went inside. Though a guardian walked ahead of them, Adolf Hitler led the way, pointing out significant features of the building. Giesler says,

It might be that the contrast from the simple atmosphere of the Fuehrer headquarters in the small village of Bruly to this magnificent display of the past Empire increased the impression it made. Up to this day, I only knew of the Opera façade and was surprised by the clear concept of the basic plan, impressed by the arrangement of the spacious rooms: the entry halls, the generous staircase, the foyers and the splendorous, gleaming, gold inner theater. We were standing in the middle loge. Adolf Hitler was fascinated – wonderful, exceptionally beautiful proportions, and what festivity! It was a theater with a special character, regardless of it's splendor of the "Belle Epoque" and a stylish eclecticism of a certain over-abundant baroque. Hitler repeated that its main importance remains within these beautiful proportions. "I would like to see the reception room, the salon of the president behind the proscenium box," said Hitler. A back and forth shuffling took place. "According to Garnier's plan, it must be around here." The guard was at first confused, but then he remembered that after a renovation the room was removed. Hitler remarked, "The democratic republic doesn’t even favor its president with his own reception salon."

The Fuehrer admires the staircase
Walking back through the foyers, they returned down the stairway and out the front entrance for a first view of the famous façade in daylight. Then to the Madeleine, which did not impress Hitler. Next on the agenda were the important squares and streets. Giesler writes:

Slowly, in a wide circle, we drove around the fountains and the Luxor obelisks at the place de la Concord. Adolf Hitler stood up in his car to get an all around view. He looked across the large square toward the Tuilleries to the Louvre, then across the Seine River to the building of the Chambre des Deputes. At the beginning of the Champs Elysees, he asked to stop. Looking at the walls of the Admiralty, he could now see, through the short street space of the rue Royal, the column gable of the Madelein – now really effective.

Hitler's car drives onto the Champs-Elysee

Adolf Hitler took his time to absorb all this – then a short signal with his hand and we drove slowly along the slightly rising Champs Elysee towards the Etoil with its all-dominating Arc de Triomphe. Critically checking this, his eyes looked at the road construction, which he could see through the tree-lined streets around the Round Point. All his concentrating attention then went to the Arc and the way the surrounding area of the Etoil was solved, space-wise. He brushed the reliefs on the right and left side of the Arc with one short look (they embody the pathos of the Marseillaise), and the chiseled inscriptions (the French would not forget any of their victorious battles). From descriptive literature he knew every detail.

Giesler tells us that Adolf Hitler later shared his thoughts about this particular experience. Hitler had said, "The luxurious expanse of the place de la Concord impresses naturally since the square expands itself into the Tuilleries Gardens to the Louvre, and over the lower bedded Seine all the way to the ministries and the Chambre des Deputes. Optically, it also encompasses the expansion towards the Madelein and the wide open space of the beginning of the Champs Elysees. From the human perspective, that’s nearly limitless. Beautiful was the view from the Concord, with its fountains and obelisk in the foreground, toward the Admiralty, the rue Royal with the Madelein in the background."
From the Etoil they drove to the Embarcadero, viewing the giant of the 19th Century, the Eiffel Tower, across the Seine from the large terrace of the Palais Chailot. Beyond it, the Mars field stretched out wide, with the Ecole Militair at its end. Giesler says they had a long debate at that point, which he recites in a shortened version:

Adolf Hitler told me that he considers the Eiffel Tower not only as the beginning of a new standard of buildings, but also as the start of an engineering type of tectonics. "This tower is not only synonymous with Paris and the world exhibition at that time, but it stands, if not yet, as an example of classicism, and yet for the beginning of a new epoch." He meant the epoch of a new technology with completely changed targets and dimensions (Groessenordnungen), at that time unknown. What follows are wide-spanned bridges, buildings with large vertical dimensions which because of exact engineering calculations could now be used as static structures. But only through coordination between engineers, artists and architects could he see the possibility of proper creativity. Classicism, which we have to aim at, can only be reached by tectonics which conform with new materials - steel and reinforced concrete indeed being proprietary.

Giesler says he was often contemplating about that, and several times later had the opportunity to discuss with Hitler his ideas about that "world of technology" and his formulations were very clear. On their further drive across the Seine to the Ecole militaire:

We stopped at a monument of a French general of the 1914-18 war with an inscription insulting German soldiers - very tasteless. Hitler got angry, waited for the accompanying car to stop, turned to the military men and ordered they see to it that it is blown up. Honoring Col. Gen. Keitel, who traveled with us, we visited the Cour d’honneur de l’Ecole militaire. Then we arrived at the highlight of our trip – at least for me.

In the dome of the Invalides, Adolf Hitler stood for a long time with his head bent on the rim of the crypt and stared down at Napoleon’s sarcophagus. I stood at his left side, not by coincidence, but because he pulled me to his side. Quietly he said to me, “Giesler, you will build my grave site, we’ll talk about it later.”

Quiet and thoughtful, he left the dome; we remained a few steps behind him. Outside the gate, Hitler turned around: "Bormann, I want the Herzog of Reichsstadt to be brought back to Paris."

The Herzog, Napoleon’s son with his 2nd wife, the Austrian Princess Marie Luise, was kept in Vienna and educated there. He died in 1832 at the age of twenty-one at the Schoenbrunn palace in Vienna and was buried at the Habsburg tomb, the “Kapuziner Gruft.” The restoration of the body of the Herzog von Reichsstadt from its burial place in Austria to the crypt of his father in Paris is one of the little-known and seldom spoken of actions undertaken by Adolf Hitler to show his respect for the French people and culture.
We drove on and stopped for a short while at a well-proportioned city palais, the future German embassy. Adolf Hitler gave orders for its careful renovation with the assistance of French conservators.

Adolf Hitler showed his disappointment with the Pantheon at the top of the Latin Quarter by leaving the building abruptly. Out in the open again, he shook his head and heaved a sigh.

“My God, it does not deserve its name, if you think about the Roman Pantheon with its classical interior, the unique lighting from the wide open ceiling – it combines dignity with solemnity. And then you look at that” – and he pointed back – “more than somber even on this bright summer day.” As they returned to their car, a few women spotted them, crying out: c’est lui – that’s he.

Bypassing the Sorbonne and Cluny across the Seine to the Ile de la Cite, driving slowly without a stop, we saw the Notre Dame. A discussion between Hitler and Breker began about the name and the use of a building. Hitler pointed toward a building with a cupola: “Isn’t that the so-called Tribunal of the Chamber of Commerce?” Breker said No, and since he lived many years in Paris he was sure about it. When we came closer it was obvious Hitler had already recognized the building from a distance by its form and location. Below the gable one could read: Tribunal de Commerce.

Crossing the Pont d’Arcole of the second Seinearm, we drove to the square in front of the Hotel de Ville to the rue de Rivoli and further to the place des Vosges. The queen Maria de Medici ordered that square arrangement, remembering her Florence. Because of the dense tree lines, the original space idea is no longer recognizable. The way the place de la Vosges presented itself did not impress Hitler. After a short look at what he could still recognize, we moved on.

The impression Hitler had of the rue de Rivoli:

“It’s kilometer-long uniform façade is just right and is effective because, at the opposite side, the Louvre and the adjoining Tuileries Gardens require that quiet and even form. All the more of a surprise, then, is the disruption of the small square with the Jeanne d’Arc monument.”

We turned around and drove through the rue Castiglioni to the place Vendome, with its famous column on this magnificently shaped square, then the rue de la Paix to the place de l’Opera, with a lofty view of the vivid, although a bit theatrical, facade of the Opera, now in bright light. Hitler admired that city-planning connection. “Certainly,” he said to me later “it is very decorative, partly
too rich, but naturally corresponding to the style taste of that epoch. Planning our architecture, we will aim at a classicism of stricter, sharper forms, according to our character. What I have seen in Paris forces me to compare the performance of the German architecture of the same period: Gilly, Schinkel, Klenze, Hansen and Semper, and Siccardsburg with his Vienna Opera – I have the impression they can hold their place. Not to mention the great creations of the baroque architects like Lukas Hildebrandt, Fischer von Erlach, Balthasar Neumann, Prandtauer and others. What the Germans miss is continuity and persistence in their architectural aims, but this is still recognizable in the Germany of the Middle Ages with cathedrals and domes of the city communities, and the baroque buildings of the royal houses.”

Approaching the Montmartre, Hitler barely looked at the Sacre Coeur. From the elevated terrace in front of the church, he wanted to see down across the part of Paris he had just visited, with its streets and squares. He wanted to get an impression of the relief effect of the buildings within the city spaces – how a certain order wins control over the jumble of buildings – how decisively the impressive buildings establish a strong order within their set scale: the Notre Dame and the Arc de Triomphe, the big squares, the great street axes, the Hausmann-avenues.

Adolf Hitler believed that as far as he could view the concentration of Paris from here, the monuments and places stood out only weakly from the monotony of living quarters and functional buildings. The great cohesion from the Louvre to the Etoile, the Ile de France with the Notre Dame, the flowing of the Seine to the Eiffel tower is just barely maintained. Actually, only this tower, meant and built for an exhibition, maintains – regardless of its filigree transparency seen from here – its reputation. What he said is that the Tower justifies its existence in this city only by the deliberately planned vertical tendency – an astonishing feature for that epoch. Naturally, for the city of Paris it meant a symbolic novelty, a city with such a deep historical tradition from the Romans to the very significant eras of the kings, the revolution, the empire, the buildings of the republic after Napoleon III; they are all meaningless, of no importance for the overall structure of the city - with the exception of the Eiffel Tower.

At this point, Giesler tells us:

Adolf Hitler turned toward us - Speer, Breker and me: "For you a tough time begins: work and pressure, the forming of cities and monuments which are put into your trust. As far as I am able, and can afford the time, I will lighten your work. Bormann will assist me. Look after my artists and keep away from them everything that might obstruct their work." And then again to us: "Put everything on Bormann's broad shoulders. He will stand by you."
Hitler greets his soldiers when leaving Paris at Le Bourget airport.

Returning to their lodgings, Adolf Hitler had more to say about the historical Paris and its architecture. This is how Giesler recalled it:

“Similar to Rome, you could read off the historical eras all over that city. Every epoch was manifested in its buildings. The remnants of the Roman founding that only archaeologists and historians can recognize. The Middle Ages, however, represent themselves powerfully in Notre Dame, not only a monument of her time but also of her mighty institution – the Church. The epoch of the worldly power, of the kings and the nobility we drove by this morning, at the Louvre and the Palais. The Revolution – she first tore down the sign of the hated system, the Bastille. For the Empire, for Napoleon I, the Arc de Triomphe symbolizes; for Napoleon III, the work of Haussmann and, strangely, the Opera!

“Then nothing more? Oh yes, something decisive – a genius engineer designs a gigantic tower. Is it beautiful? It does not matter, it mirrors his epoch. The occasion was significant – first the World Exhibition, then it stands for the Revolution. A hundred years after 1789, that Tower points to a new time – the time of industrial development. It is a monument of technology, sets its own rule – tectonics unknown up to that date, the building material steel – and thus a new method is recognized. What the tower misses is classicism – stone so uniquely used with the Doric column. We will talk some more about that phenomenon.”

Giesler remembers being fascinated by Hitler’s analysis and explanation of the Eiffel Tower as a symbol, not just for Paris, but of the new era. It indicates how strongly he felt that history, men and institutions influenced art and architecture and shaped cities. Thirty years later, the explanation remained for Giesler, but not the fascination, which he says was rooted in the presence of Hitler himself. He continues:

Adolf Hitler was quiet for a while before he said with a low voice: “At the dome des Invalides, I really absorbed only Napoleon’s sarcophagus at the open Ronda of the crypt. I kept strangely under the spell – everything else was for me meaningless.”

After a while, he reasoned why he wanted his gravesite in Munich, why I should build it and in what form he wanted it to be built. It surprised me, but still, as a
National Socialist, that reasoning made a lot of sense. That he discussed that on the
day of the victorious finale of the French battle was certainly caused by the view of
Napoleon’s gravesite. But this thought suggested that he was thinking about that
for a long time.

Hitler not surprisingly brought his thoughts again to the present situation and
expressed his strong desire for a peace settlement – remembering the end of the
destructive Thirty Years War and the Westfalian peace treaty signed in Muenster.
Was he comparing the past nearly thirty turbulent years since 1914, and hoping to
end it in the same way? Very possibly this was going through his mind.

Silently we walked up and down the narrow path through the forest. Then Adolf
Hitler stopped and said with great emphasis: "I want peace - and I will do anything
to make peace! It is not too late yet. I will go to the limit of the possible as long as
the sacrifice and dignity of the German nation allows it. I know of better things
than waging war. If I merely think about the loss of German blood - the best
always fall, the bravest and the ones willing to be sacrificed; their task should be to
exemplify the nation.

“I do not need to make a name by war-mongering like Churchill. I would like to
make my name as a steward of the German people. I want to secure its unity and
Lebensraum, to achieve National Socialism and shape the environment – add to it
the new rebuilding of the German cities according to modern knowledge. I would
like that the people will be happy there and be proud of their town, their
lebensraum, and nation.”

After awhile he said the peace should be signed in Muenster. “I have my reasons
for that – it would mean an historical caesura. When I now return to Munich, I
have to take the necessary steps for the beginning of the rebuilding of the city – a
forward-looking planning in all areas of a city-wide development.” I, and also
Speer, would receive orders from him to start immediately with reconstruction.
That naturally includes especially the central railway station and the Autobahn
circle - they are the prerequisite of further rebuilding of the city. Dr. Todt will
receive the order to make the necessary steel available. Then he repeated again: “I
will Peace,” and changed the subject.

At the time of November the 8th, Hitler was worried because of a strange event. I
experienced it personally. He asked himself at that time if it was only careless
talking and leaking at high military levels, or high treason. No, he is certain it was
high treason, and that high treason has been repeated: the deadline, day and hour of
the “Weseruebung” for securing our Northern flank has been transmitted to the
governments of Denmark and Norway. “No, listen,” he said, “also betrayed was the beginning of the battle of France, May 10th.” I was alarmed and wanted to ask …. “No questions, don’t talk about it!”

We all joined for the late dinner at the community barrack. June 23rd ended and the armistice began. The trumpet signals Das Ganze halt (All hold) arrived out of the night from different distances. The windows were open. Separate from us, Adolf Hitler stood alone folding his hands. He looked into the darkness. When, long after the signal he returned to us, he had tears in his eyes. Quietly, with his typical loose move, he said goodbye to us. He lifted his bent arm, the hand upwards-opened, like a greeting of friendship.”

Who cannot be moved by the poignant and revelatory picture that emerges during this Paris visit of an Adolf Hitler whose deep awareness of history and far-reaching understanding of the role of art and architecture in the lives of peoples and nations, causes him naturally to prefer peace to war? Here is a man who wants to build and beautify, not tear down and degrade, with always his faith in his people, the German people, and his concern for Europe as a whole as his motivation and inspiration. On the tail of a decisive victory, he wanted to make peace, and build a united, anti-communist Europe. It was not to be. The new Europe was instead built on the ashes and rubble of his Germany, and he has been condemned as the destroyer, when he really wanted to be a great builder.

Endnotes:

1) Reichsleiter Martin Bormann was responsible to execute all of Hitler's orders in the civil sector.

2) Hitler got the message while at Giesler’s office that the military plans for the attack in the West had been betrayed to the Allies. He had to change his plans and postpone it twice, to Spring 1940. Ein Anderer Hitler, Hermann Giesler, page 411: “I ordered the attack for middle November. Then that mysterious betrayal of the planned start of the attack deadline.”

3) Weseruebung was the code name for the Denmark/Norway invasion.

4) The salute of the party, the NSDAP

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