

SA

(*Sturmabteilung*, Storm Troopers), also known as "Brown Shirts," the Nazi Party militia that helped Adolf Hitler rise to power in Germany.

Created in 1922, the SA's supposed purpose was to guard Nazi Party meetings, but in actuality, Hitler meant for the group to serve as the Nazi army. The SA was extremely antisemitic and antidemocratic in its military activities. Its members were mainly lower-middle class Germans who had lost their jobs due to the country's economic problems. The SA gave them something to be part of and proud of. They engaged in street fights with their political enemies, practiced pseudo-military exercises, and terrorized Germany.

Ernst Rohm became the Supreme Commander of the SA in 1924. Around that time, Hitler began calling for the use of legal means to take control of Germany. Rohm was not satisfied with this: he wanted the SA to be the basis of a revitalized German army that would take power by force. Hitler rejected Rohm, and in 1925, Rohm stepped down. However, Hitler invited him back to his old job in 1930 after the Nazis' electoral victory, and ordered him to rebuild the SA.

Rohm took to the task with a vengeance. In just a few short years, the SA's membership grew from 70,000 to more than four million. Rohm divided Germany into 21 military-like districts, created flying squads and the Nazi Motor Corps, and reorganized the SA high command. When Hitler rose to national power in 1933, the SA became an official government organization. SA soldiers joined the regular police in order to arrest and torture ideological, political, and even personal enemies, including many Jews. They set up concentration camps for this purpose. However, when Rohm showed signs of wanting to take control of the army and rebel against Hitler in a military coup, the SS massacred him and other SA leaders in the "Night of the Long Knives"--June 30, 1934. From then on, the SA was no longer a dominant organization within the Reich, but it continued to exist, its members guarding concentration camps and terrorizing enemies of the Nazi regime.

