

I

Childhood and Youth

In 1980, a few weeks before his death, the German writer Alfred Andersch concluded work on an autobiographical ‘school story’. The story describes a Greek lesson at the Wittelsbach Grammar School in Munich that took place fifty-two years before the story was published. Its model is the last Greek lesson Andersch experienced at this school in 1928.

The drama begins when ‘Rex’, the school’s strict and universally feared headmaster, appears on a surprise visit to the class. First there is an argument between Rex and a very self-confident pupil from an aristocratic family that quickly escalates and ends with the headmaster telling the disobedient pupil, who will not submit to his authority, that he is expelled. But this was only the prelude: now Rex summons the hero of the story, whom Andersch calls Franz Kien, to the blackboard. Not only does he parade with positive pleasure the boy’s pathetic knowledge of Greek, but with every trick of his trade—sarcasm, malice, meanness of spirit—he demolishes Kien-Andersch. He too is obliged to leave the school.

‘Rex’, it is revealed, was in fact called Himmler, and Andersch gave the story the title ‘The Father of a Murderer’.

Andersch’s ‘school story’ is a plausible attempt to understand the phenomenon that was Himmler: The career of a mass murderer, it is suggested here, is the result of a father-son conflict, in the course of which Heinrich Himmler becomes a radical right-wing revolutionary, rebelling against his overly strict father and turning into his ‘mortal enemy’. Andersch asks if it was not inevitable that, ‘as a result of “natural determinism”’ (defined as the obvious rules of psychology, the laws of conflict between one generation and the next, and the paradoxical consequences of family tradition) ‘such a father would produce such a son?’ Andersch conceded that he had no definitive answer to this question.

After the advance publication of Andersch's story in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* numerous letters appeared in the newspaper from readers who had known Gebhard Himmler personally. They do not paint an unambiguous picture: He is described as 'the kind of person who grovels to his superiors while oppressing his inferiors', but also as a 'vigorous person of high intellect who commanded respect'.¹

Otto Gritschneider, a well-known Munich lawyer, who in numerous publications has criticized the Bavarian judicial system under National Socialism, recalled his former teacher Gebhard Himmler 'as Rex the just (and justice is of course very important to pupils), honestly striving to communicate to our young minds the culture and history of our native country and our continent'. Furthermore, Gritschneider had sat in the same classroom as Andersch. According to his account, Andersch had simply been a bad pupil and the decision to put an end to his career at the Wittelsbach Grammar School had been entirely reasonable.²

The Himmlers and their son Heinrich

As the son of a low-ranking Protestant civil servant, Gebhard Himmler, Heinrich Himmler's father, was a classic case of upward social mobility. Born in 1809, his father Johann Himmler, who came from a family of peasants and artisans from Ansbach and was himself trained as a weaver, had in the course of a varied career in the Bavarian military and police worked his way up to the rank of 'brigadier' (the police equivalent of sergeant). After his retirement in 1862 he had been employed up to his death in 1872 in the district administration of Lindau. A few months after his move to Lindau Johann Himmler, now 53, married Agathe Rosina Kiene, who was twenty-four years his junior, a Catholic and the daughter of a clockmaker from Bregenz.³

In 1865 the couple had a son, Gebhard. When he was 7 years old his father died. His mother brought him up a Catholic, and it was probably due to her influence that he owed that energy and commitment that helped him succeed in rising socially from his petit-bourgeois background to the professional middle class. In 1884 he began to study at Munich University, specializing in German literature and classical languages and graduating in 1888.⁴ He went on to spend some time in St Petersburg, where at that point there was a relatively large German colony. There he was employed as a

private tutor in the house of the honorary consul Freiherr von Lamezan.⁵ Lamezan's friendship with the Bavarian Prince Regent Luitpold created contacts at the Bavarian court. Gebhard Himmler returned to Bavaria and tried to establish himself as a grammar-school teacher. From 1890 he taught first on a temporary basis at the Munich Grammar School, but from 1894 onwards he enjoyed the rare privilege of being appointed by Prince Arnulf of Wittelsbach, a brother of the Prince Regent and of the later King Ludwig III of Bavaria, as private tutor to his son Heinrich.⁶ After completing this task successfully, in 1897 Gebhard Himmler was given a permanent position as a teacher at the long-established Wilhelm Grammar School in Munich.⁷

His new position enabled him finally to establish a family. In 1897 he married Anna Maria Heyder, the daughter of a Munich businessman. At the time they married she was 31, a year younger than her husband; she too had lost her father, who was 55 when she was born, at the age of 6.⁸ It is thought she brought a not-inconsiderable fortune to the marriage.⁹

Heinrich, who was born on 7 October 1900, was the second child of this union, after Gebhard, who was born in July 1898. It was a great honour for the Himmlers that Prince Heinrich, then 16 years old, agreed to Gebhard Himmler's request that he be the child's godfather. Though the prince was ninth in line to the Wittelsbach crown and thus unlikely to succeed, his role as godparent strengthened the family's link to the court, and for the future of the ambitious Himmlers this was enormously important.¹⁰ The youngest addition to the Himmler family was naturally named after his influential godfather; Luitpold, the name of the Prince Regent, was chosen for his second Christian name. Ludwig, the name of the Bavarian king who had died in 1886, had been selected for the eldest son's second Christian name. In 1905 Heinrich's younger brother Ernst was born.

It is clear that the Himmlers succeeded in their efforts to create an ordered life characterized by regular habits, hard work, and religious observance, as was typical of comfortably off families of state officials in Munich around 1900. While the mother devoted herself to the household and the welfare of the children, the father not only immersed himself in his career as a grammar-school teacher but tried also to give his sons as far as possible the benefit of his pedagogic skills.¹¹

Central to this education was the transmission of a solid cultural canon, comprising in particular classical literature and sound knowledge of history and of Greek and Latin. The strong emphasis the father placed on acquainting his sons with social conventions and manners presumably also betrays

the lack of confidence of someone who came from modest circumstances. It went without saying that religious belief and active participation in church life were part of the children's upbringing; Anna Himmler in particular attached so much importance to establishing their Catholic faith that their father felt he must warn against taking such things too far.¹²

As a father he exercised his authority not through being unapproachable or through overbearing strictness but rather through patient efforts with his sons; they were subject to a system of rules and prohibitions, while their father monitored their obedience precisely and at times pedantically. His strictness was designed to have a lasting effect and seems to have been altogether compatible with kindness, love, and affection.¹³ In addition he spent a considerable part of his free time on his stamp collection, introducing his sons to this hobby as well. He also taught them stenography; a large part of the family correspondence is written in shorthand.¹⁴

Himmler's father kept a particular check on his children's successes at school and encouraged them to use the school holidays to consolidate what they had been taught. When his eldest son Gebhard lost more than half of his first school year through various illnesses, his father made great efforts not only to make up for what the boy had missed but to make him top of the class by the end of the second school year.¹⁵ In addition, both parents paid attention to 'suitable friendships' for their offspring, preferably with children from Munich's upper middle classes.

Gebhard Himmler's pedantry, to which his great-niece has drawn attention, emerged in a particularly blatant form in 1910 when he was getting ready to embark on a journey to Greece—without his family. Gebhard made comprehensive preparations for the eventuality of his not returning alive. He wrote a long farewell letter to every member of the family, containing detailed advice on their future lives and numerous practical pointers on how to deal with everyday problems. He commended to his son Gebhard a veritable catalogue of virtues, calling on him to be 'hard-working, dutiful, and morally upright' and enjoining him to become 'a conscientious, religious man with a German outlook'. These words exactly reflect the maxims by which he brought up his three sons.¹⁶ Unfortunately his letter to Heinrich has not survived. What becomes clear from these letters is that Himmler wanted his sons to go to university and gain their doctorate, though not in philology or theology. They were not to become officers either.

In those years before the First World War the Himmlers lived in apartments in favoured but by no means exclusive areas.¹⁷ They employed a

maid and were clearly free from financial worries. They kept up extensive contacts with numerous family members and had a relatively large circle of acquaintances.¹⁸ The link to Prince Heinrich was maintained, and he took a lively interest in the progress of his godson and in how the Himmlers were faring. It was a warm relationship, as is shown by the preserved correspondence between Gebhard and the prince; at Christmas the Himmlers regularly received a visit from the prince and his mother, who after the death of her husband Prince Arnulf took the name Princess Arnulf.¹⁹

Solidly conservative, monarchist, Catholic, economically secure and culturally traditional, the Himmlers lived in a milieu that stood in stark contrast to the widespread reputation enjoyed by turn-of-the-century Munich as being the metropolis of a self-consciously modern culture, an art-loving, tolerant, and lively city. In fact cultural modernism and political liberalism in Munich had been in retreat since 1900. From the turn of the century the liberal city administration and Bavarian state ministry had found themselves increasingly under pressure from the Catholic-conservative Centre Party, which protested in particular against 'immorality' and against unconventional cultural trends, and specifically against the bohemian artistic world of the Schwabing district. In line with this stance of uncompromising rejection in the field of cultural politics, the Himmlers' world was largely untouched by the works of a Thomas or Heinrich Mann, by the Blaue Reiter artists, the Schwabing cabaret scene, or art nouveau.²⁰

In 1902 the family moved temporarily to Passau, where Gebhard Himmler had been appointed to a post at the grammar school.²¹ In February 1903 the 2-year-old Heinrich fell ill with a lung complaint, so his mother took the children for a few months to Wolfegg, a village in the Allgäu, as a cure for the illness. There was serious danger of Heinrich contracting tuberculosis, at that time the most common cause of infant death. When Heinrich's health was improving they returned to Passau; yet it is clear that the parents were anxious about the usual childhood diseases, which, as Heinrich was already severely weakened, threatened to have severe, perhaps fatal, results.²²

In 1904 the family moved back to Munich, where Gebhard Himmler, who had in the meantime been promoted to the post of grammar-school professor,^{*} took up a position at the Ludwig Grammar School. Again the Himmlers moved into an apartment, this time in Amalienstrasse 86,

^{*} *Translators' note:* senior academic teacher.

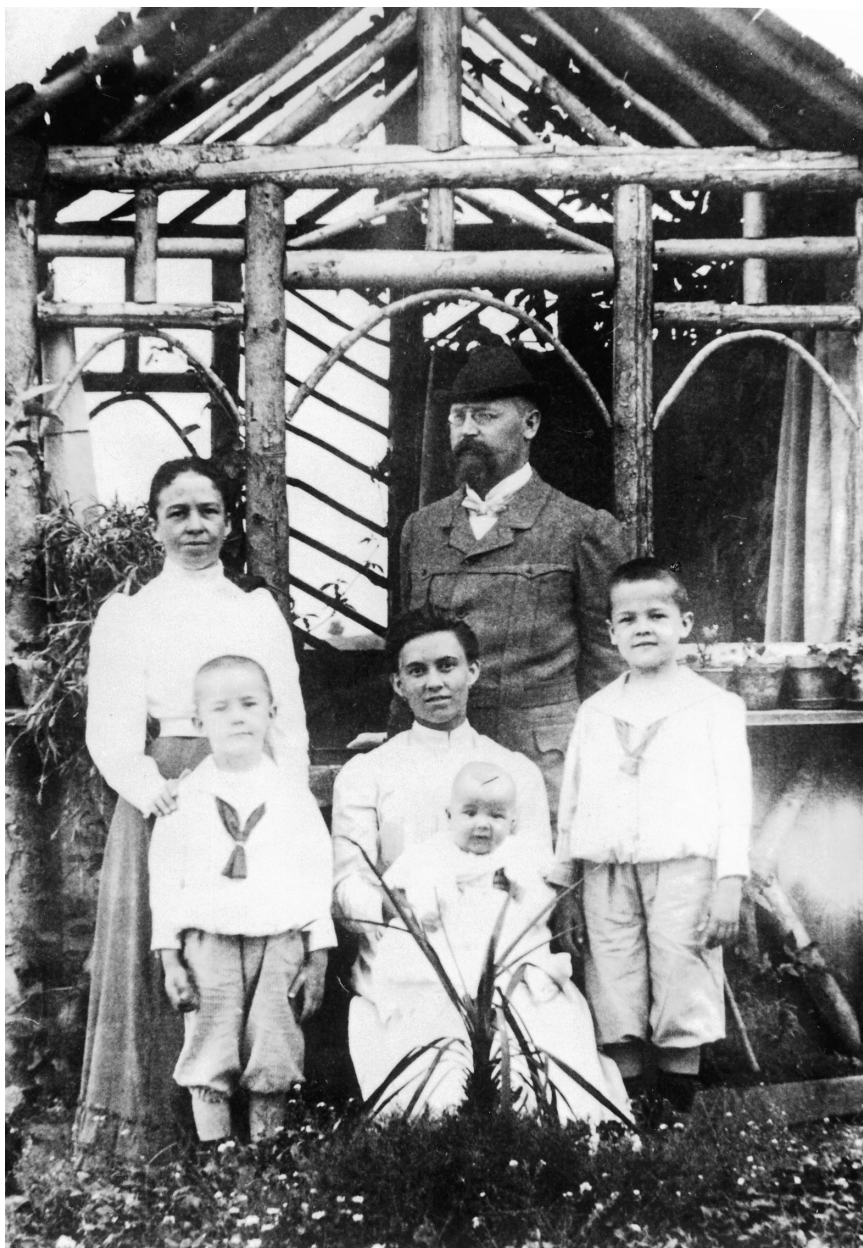
immediately behind the university.²³ This was the start of a difficult time for Heinrich: not only did his brother, who had started school in September 1904, fall ill with a series of infections and thus replace Heinrich as the focus of his parents' care and attention, but Anna Himmler was facing a further pregnancy. In December 1905 Ernst was born, and Heinrich saw his parents' attention being directed primarily towards his younger brother.²⁴

Heinrich was now in the complex position of the middle son, trapped between the model of the superior big brother and the solicitous care focused on little Ernst. In this situation, in which he perhaps feared being sidelined in the family, his illnesses became not only periods of suffering but also the chance to recapture his parents' interest. This experience is possibly at the root of his later psychosomatic complaints. Towards his younger brother he began to develop a certain good-natured condescension.²⁵

In 1906 Heinrich started school at the cathedral school on Salvatorplatz in the city centre (and not at the school in Amalienstrasse which was the proper school for children from his district). Yet even here he was at first unlucky. Like his brother before him, in his first school year he missed a total of 150 school days through various infections such as coughs, measles, mumps, and above all pneumonia. With the help of a private tutor he caught up with the schoolwork he had missed,²⁶ but the fact that his parents, and in particular his father, had high expectations of him may well have combined with the new family dynamic created by his younger brother to put him under pressure—the more so because, in spite of good marks, he did not do as well as his elder brother. Only when he moved to the school in Amalienstrasse did his situation seem to ease. Heinrich was a good pupil there and also made friends with some of his classmates.²⁷

The long summer holidays, which the family mostly spent in the foothills of the Bavarian Alps, were undoubtedly the most exciting time of the year. There were visits to places of interest, walks, boat trips, and other leisure activities. In 1910, on holiday in Lenggries, his father gave Heinrich the task of keeping a diary about their stay that summer. He wrote the first entry himself to show his son what to do. He continued to read and correct the boy's entries and saw to it that in the years following he wrote similar holiday diaries.²⁸

It is hardly surprising that these holiday diaries resemble school exercises and basically do no more than list the activities. For instance, in 1911 Heinrich provided a running record of how many times he had gone swimming: the total was thirty-seven times.²⁹ This terse recounting of the



III. 1. Gebhard and Anna Himmler (seated) with their three children, Heinrich (left), Ernst (middle), and Gebhard (right), in 1906.

events of each day was something Heinrich continued with after his father had stopped checking the diaries. Paternal monitoring was replaced by self-monitoring.³⁰

In 1910 Heinrich moved to the Wilhelm Grammar School, where his father had taught up to 1902.³¹ At this time the boy was slightly built and relatively short. He had a sickly constitution, he was frequently unwell, and his whole appearance was delicate. The spectacles he was obliged to wear all the time dominated his round, still decidedly childish face. His receding chin reinforced this impression.

When one of his former fellow pupils, Wolfgang Hallgarten (he had fled from the Nazis to the United States and meanwhile become one of the leading American historians of Germany), discovered decades later that the future 'man of terror' had actually been the classmate whom everyone called 'Himmler', he simply refused at first to believe the irrefutable fact. Too great was the contrast between the Reichsführer-SS and that 'child of hardly average height, who was unusually pale and physically very awkward, with hair cut fairly short and even then a pair of gold-rimmed glasses on his slightly pointed nose', and who was frequently seen with 'a half-embarrassed, half-malicious smile on his face'. According to Hallgarten, Himmler had been a model pupil, liked by all the teachers; amongst the boys he had been regarded as a swot and been only moderately popular. Hallgarten had a particularly clear memory of the unhappy figure Himmler cut, much to the amusement of his fellows, in gymnastics. Hatred of the Jews, Hallgarten went on to say, was not something Himmler was at all associated with at that time; on the other hand, he said he remembered Heinrich's radically anti-French outlook.³²

In 1913 Professor Himmler took over as deputy head of the grammar school in Landshut. This enabled the family to move into a house with a garden.³³ Fortunately a Munich friend, Falk Zipperer, also moved with his family to Landshut, where his stepfather, Ferdinand von Pracher, had become head of the district administration, from the Himmlers' point of view an ideal family background for their son's best friend. The friendship was to be lasting: in 1937, on the occasion of his friend's wedding, Himmler gave a lunch party;³⁴ in 1938 he accepted him into the SS, and in 1940 Zipperer, who had in the meantime gained his second doctorate in legal history, published an essay in a Festschrift for Himmler's fortieth birthday.³⁵ In 1944, when Himmler was getting ready for his last Christmas, Zipperer's wife, Liselotte, was noted down for a present.³⁶

Another friendship that lasted to the end of the Second World War was with Karl Gebhard, three years older than Himmler. The two boys met in Landshut. Gebhard became a doctor and was later director of a sanatorium in Hohenlychen in the Berlin area that, as we shall see, was to play a special role in Himmler's life.³⁷ Heinrich also remained friends with Edi and Luisa Hager, whose father was a senior museums and galleries administrator.³⁸ On this evidence Heinrich was not at all a lone wolf, even if his classmates may have considered him a model pupil, a swot, and a weakling. His attainments during his time at school in Landshut, which lasted until 1919, were in fact above average. In religious education and history he was always graded 'very good' and in languages he was judged 'very good' to 'good'; his weakest subject was physics, for which one year he was given only 'satisfactory'. A school report from 1913/14 reads: 'An apparently very able student who by tireless hard work, burning ambition and very lively participation achieved the best results in the class. His conduct was exemplary.'³⁹

Youth in wartime

Into this well-ordered world, just as the family was enjoying the summer of 1914 in picturesque Tittmoning on the German–Austrian border, burst the news of the crisis precipitated by the murder of the heir to the Austrian throne on 28 June in Sarajevo, which culminated in the outbreak of the First World War.

Heinrich's diary entries, in which the alarming news is recorded alongside the usual notes on his everyday activities, reflect the atmosphere of these decisive days and the sudden termination of the holiday idyll. For 29 July we read: 'Gebhard's birthday. *Outbreak of war between Austria and Serbia*. Excursion to Lake Waging.' The announcement of the outbreak of war is underlined in red. The entries for the next two days, which clearly concerned the programme of activities, are rubbed out and over the top, again in red, is written the sentence: '*Proclamation of a state of war*'. And now political and military events moved centre stage:

1. VIII. *Germany mobilizes* 2nd army corps. Even the Landsturm [territorials].
2. VIII. Played in the garden in the morning. Afternoon as well. 7.30 *Germany declares war on Russia*.

3. VIII. *Attacks on the French and Russian borders. Planes and spies.* We are packing up right away.

The Himmlers hurried back to Landshut. The abrupt end to the holiday was to mark the end of an era.

From now on military events, which at first went very well for Germany, dominate Heinrich's diary entries; for example, the entry for 23 August:

German Crown Prince's victory north of Metz (Longeville). Prince Heinrich wrote to father. During the attack on the French dragoons he was slightly wounded. Germany gives a dignified response to Japan's ultimatum. Germans in Ghent. Played the piano. [...] The Bavarians are said to have been very brave in yesterday's battle. In particular our 16ers are supposed to have put up an excellent fight with their bayonets. There are flags out all over town. The French and Belgians must have been surprised to be beaten so quickly. Territorial 1st Regiment has been called up. Namur is besieged. 8000 Russians taken prisoner at Gumbinnen.

And the next day he noted with excitement:

Pursuing the French has brought the army of the Bavarian Crown Prince rich pickings (prisoners, standards, and 150 guns). The 21st army corps has marched into Luneville. The Crown Prince's army is also still pursuing the enemy (advancing towards Longwy). Duke Albrecht of Württemberg beat a French army that was advancing across the Semois. The enemy is pursued and booty taken: Prisoners, generals, guns, standards. Our troops advance to the west of the Meuse towards Maubeuge. An English cavalry brigade is there and is beaten, really beaten! Hurray!

Every day he went to the offices of the local newspaper, where the latest news telegrams were displayed:

27. VIII. [...] Afternoon, went to see the telegrams. Prince Luitpold of Bavaria, the heir to the throne, has died of a throat infection in Berchtesgaden. The light cruiser, the Magdeburg, ran aground in fog at Odensholm [Osmussaar] in the Gulf of Finland and could not be refloated. [...] The cruiser was scuttled. 85 men are missing, some are dead or wounded, another was picked up by a German torpedo boat. The worried philistines of Landshut are now hanging their heads, spreading dreadful rumours, and fearing that they will be massacred by the Cossacks. Today the first sizeable list of Bavarian army casualties was published.

28. VIII. [...] English army beaten.. [...] Now we are making terrific progress. I'm as happy at these victories as the English and French are no doubt annoyed at them, and the annoyance will be considerable. Falk and I would really like to fight right now ourselves. It's clear that the good old Germans and their loyal allies the Austrians are not afraid of a world full of enemies.

Seemingly those around him did not share that view to the same extent, as he records in a critical tone on 27 August: 'Generally speaking there is no particular enthusiasm in Lower Bavaria among the people at home. When the mobilization was announced in the old town everyone apparently started blubbing. I would have expected that least of all of the Lower Bavarians. They are usually so ready for a fight. A wounded soldier says the same. Often really dreadful and stupid rumours go round, all invented by people.'

On 6 September he noted that the people of Landshut were 'as mindless and fearful as ever. When they heard, as they thought, the news of the troops' retreat near Paris they all got diarrhoea and their hearts went into their boots. It's terrible how rumours fly about.'

On 30 August he observed, with contempt for the people in the town and compassion for the enemy captives, how a transport of French wounded was cared for at the station: 'The whole station was full of inquisitive Landshuters who became abusive and even violent when the seriously wounded French soldiers (who must be worse off than our wounded, because they're prisoners) were given water and bread.' He clearly regarded the Russians somewhat differently, as an entry from 4 September reveals: 'There are 90,000 Russians captured in East Prussia, not 70,000. (They multiply like vermin.)'

In spite of the war the Himmlers went on a summer holiday as usual in 1915, this time to Burghausen. Their arrival at the station in Mühlendorf revived Heinrich's memories of the start of the war a year before. Although the jubilant patriotism of the first phase of the war was now over, he could not help having vivid recollections of the previous summer, 'when we stood at about the same time on the platform, doing army drill. It was 6 August when we came back from Tittmoning. A few days later they went off cheerfully to war. How many of them are alive today?'⁴⁰

Everything connected with war and the military fascinated him. When in September 1915 his brother, who was two years older, had the opportunity to accompany his parents on a visit to wounded soldiers Heinrich acknowledged in his diary how much he envied him.⁴¹ At the beginning of 1915 the Army Reserve (*Landwehr*) had created trenches and dugouts that Heinrich's class went to see. Heinrich was impressed: They are sketched and described in his diary.⁴²

In July 1915 his brother Gebhard reached the age of 17 and joined the Territorials (*Landsturm*) and so could be counted as belonging to the military reserve. Heinrich commented longingly: 'If only I were old enough, I'd be

out there like a shot.⁴³ But as he was 14 at the outbreak of war Himmler was part of the so-called war youth generation: too young to be sent to the front as soldiers and yet old enough to follow the military and political events closely from the start, and also marked by the experience of having endured all the phases of the war as a collective national effort.⁴⁴

In the early phase of the war in particular Heinrich and his friends tried to create through play some kind of access to the 'normality' of the war, which was to last for four years.⁴⁵ Sometimes in his diary the boundaries between war as a game and the real war become blurred: 'Played in the garden with Falk. 1000 Russians captured by our troops east of the Vistula. Austrians advance', he noted on 26 August 1914. Three days later: 'Played at sword-fighting with Falk. This time with 40 army corps and Russia, France and Belgium against Germany and Austria. The game is very interesting. Victory over the Russians in East Prussia (50,000 prisoners).'

From Easter to autumn 1915 he was a member of the Cadet Corps (*Jugendwehr*), where he and his classmates were given the preliminaries of military training. He was noted as showing 'commendable enthusiasm'.⁴⁶ 'To the Cadet Corps in the afternoon. Practice was pretty poor. I was lying for about quarter of an hour in a fairly wet field. It didn't do me any harm, though,' he noted in his diary.⁴⁷

Heinrich began to complain of stomach pains, an ailment he suffered from to the end of his life.⁴⁸ He tried to overcome his physical weakness through sport. In his diary there is a reference to daily training with dumb-bells.⁴⁹ In February 1917 he became a member of the Landshut gymnastics club.⁵⁰

Meanwhile the war began to affect the Himmlers' everyday life. Restrictions on the supply of food and important commodities became increasingly evident. In November 1916 the government introduced the Patriotic Auxiliary Service, which committed every German male aged between 17 and 60 who was not already in military service to make himself available for important war work. In the same month the news reached the Himmlers that Heinrich's godfather Prince Heinrich had been killed in Romania; he was only 32 years old. The Himmlers mourned not only a significant family friend but also the fact that their privileged access to the court, which had always held out the most alluring prospects for the three sons' future, was now irrevocably lost.⁵¹

In 1917 his elder brother's year group was called up into the armed forces: Gebhard had been in the Territorials for two years and in May 1917 he

joined the 16th Bavarian Infantry Regiment in Passau, where he completed the first stage of officer training.⁵² Falk Zipperer also left the grammar school in April 1917 and began officer training.⁵³

Heinrich, who had been continuing his pre-military training since October 1915 in the Landshut Cadet Corps, wanted to take the same course.⁵⁴ In the summer of 1917, probably as a result of pressure from his son, Himmmler's father began to make extensive efforts to get him accepted as a candidate for officer training with one of the Bavarian regiments. He successfully enlisted the help of the chamberlain to Princess Arnulf, the mother of the dead Prince Heinrich, and amongst other things he intervened to support Heinrich's application for the exclusive 1st and 2nd Infantry Regiments. His efforts were in vain, however, as the lists of applicants were already too long.⁵⁵ In the course of his correspondence with the military authorities Himmmler's father was called upon to respond to the question of whether his son was considering becoming a professional army officer. 'My son Heinrich has a strong desire to be an infantry officer by profession', was his clear answer.⁵⁶

Shortly before the start of the new school year—he had spent the usual summer holiday in Bad Tölz—Heinrich surprised everyone by leaving the grammar school. Up to that point he had completed seven years at the school. His last report indicated that he was a good, though not an excellent, pupil.⁵⁷ His leaving was evidently motivated by his fear of being conscripted while still at school, along with his cohort, before he had succeeded in gaining a post as an officer candidate in a first-class regiment. He was successful in his application to the Regensburg city administration for the patriotic auxiliary service: in October 1917 he was set to work in the war welfare office, an organization for the care of surviving relatives of fallen soldiers. After six weeks he put an end to this interlude and went back to the grammar school, after the schools ministry had made it clear in a directive that his age-group of pupils would not yet be conscripted.⁵⁸

Heinrich the soldier

On 23 December he received the surprising news that the 11th Infantry Regiment would accept him as an officer candidate. Yet again the chamberlain already mentioned had been pulling strings: Himmmler's father's contacts at court had, after all, finally been effective.⁵⁹ Heinrich left school and on

2 January began his training with the reserve battalion of the 11th Regiment at a camp near Regensburg.⁶⁰

He proudly signed one of his first letters to his parents with the Latin tag 'Miles Heinrich', Heinrich the soldier, and the brand-new warrior expressed his manliness amongst other things by taking up smoking.⁶¹ In contrast to this masculine pose, his almost daily letters to his parents in fact reveal the considerable difficulties he had in adjusting to the world of the military. Heinrich was homesick. He complained about the poor accommodation and wretched food, though on most evenings he could supplement this by going to pubs. He asked constantly for more frequent replies to his letters, for food, clean clothes, and other such things that would make his life in the barracks easier.⁶² If his requests were not immediately fulfilled (he did after all receive seven parcels from home in the first five weeks of his military career⁶³) he reacted in a hurt manner: 'Dearest parents! Today again I have got nothing from you. That's mean.'⁶⁴ After a few weeks he got used to the new life and the complaints in his letters became less frequent. Yet the correspondence shows how much he was still reliant on close contact with his parents.⁶⁵

From the middle of February 1918 he regularly received leave to spend most weekends at home. By contrast, his brother Gebhard was sent in April 1918 to the western front and took part in heavy fighting in which there were severe losses.⁶⁶ Heinrich, however, became petulant if he got no mail from home for a few days: 'Dear Mother! Thank you so much for your news (which I did not get). It's so horrid of you not to write again.'⁶⁷ When the Regensburg training was coming to an end he hoped that he too would be sent to the front, but to his disappointment he learned that he was to be sent on a further training course. 'You could have saved your tears', he wrote to his mother, who had been viewing the prospect of a second son at the front with anxiety. 'Don't rejoice too soon, though. Things can change again just as quickly.'⁶⁸ On 15 June he continued his training just 40 kilometres from Landshut, in Freising. He was still able to spend most weekends at home.⁶⁹

In his letters he described daily life in the military as before, but he now coped with it considerably better, as his lapidary descriptions show: 'We are given excellent treatment. This afternoon we bathed. [...] The food is very good.'⁷⁰ As before, problems with the food and reports about his changeable health are prominent;⁷¹ his hunger for the many 'lovely little parcels'⁷² from Landshut, for which he always sent a thank-you letter ('the cake was

terrific!⁷³), never seemed to abate. Yet as the correspondence shows, his obvious need for the affection and love of his parents could not really be satisfied. Although he tried, after initial difficulties, to present himself to his parents in a manly, adult, and soldierly light (and he was certainly also impressed by the example of his elder brother, who was, after all, at the very same time in immediate mortal danger at the front), his letters continued to demand their lively participation in his everyday concerns and their permanent support in dealing with them.

In August he began to long for the end of the Freising course: 'The Freising course is getting more and more rotten and strict: oh well, we'll make a reasonable job of it, even if we're not brilliant', he wrote home.⁷⁴ Even after finishing this course⁷⁵ he was not, as he expected, sent to the front but had to complete a further course: he was ordered to Bamberg to begin a special two-week training in the use of heavy machine-guns on 15 September.⁷⁶ Even though it was becoming clear on the western front how critical the German military situation was after the failure of their spring offensive, the German army continued to give its officers extremely thorough training. Or was it that Heinrich's superiors thought he was simply not mature enough to be sent to the front as an officer cadet?

At the beginning of October the Bamberg course was over, and after a week's leave he had to go back to Regensburg to help, amongst other things, with the training of recruits.⁷⁷ Heinrich took a pessimistic view of the general situation: 'I now see the political future as terribly black, completely black', he wrote on 16 October to his parents. Like many others, he now regarded revolution as inevitable.⁷⁸

Even so, Heinrich was determined to prove himself in action, and wrote an enthusiastic letter home saying he had met a lieutenant who had offered to transfer him to the front.⁷⁹ But that never happened, for in view of the political turbulence that was erupting at the beginning of November the company destined for the front was disbanded. He experienced the overthrow of the political regime and the end of the war in Landshut: on 7 November revolution broke out in Munich and the Bavarian king abdicated. On 9 November the revolutionary Council of the People's Deputies set itself up in Berlin and Kaiser Wilhelm II fled to Holland. On 11 November the new government signed the armistice, and in so doing conceded the defeat of the German Reich.

At the end of November Heinrich returned to his unit in Regensburg in the hope that the army would complete the training of the cohort of ensigns

born in 1900. At first, however, he worked with his cousin Ludwig Zahler, who had in the meantime been promoted to lieutenant, on the demobbing of the regiment. Both rented rooms in Regensburg.⁸⁰ Heinrich also began to prepare for his Abitur.[★]⁸¹ In Regensburg he became a sympathizer of the Bavarian People's Party (BVP), which had been founded in November 1918 by leading politicians of the Bavarian Centre Party. Heinrich contacted one of Gebhard's former classmates who was now active in the local Regensburg BVP party organization, and also called on his father to work for the new party.⁸²

His brother Gebhard, meanwhile promoted to lieutenant and decorated with the Iron Cross, had returned uninjured from the front at the beginning of December. Heinrich, on the other hand, was forced to recognize a little while later that there was no longer any chance that he could continue his military career. In December 1918 he learned that all ensigns of his cohort were to be discharged from the army.⁸³ On 18 December he was demobbed and returned to Landshut.⁸⁴ The fact that he neither saw action at the front nor became an officer was to him a serious failure. Throughout his life he was to hold to the view that he had been prevented from following his true calling, that of an officer.

★ *Translators' note:* Grammar-school leaving examination.