

Speer, Albert

(1905--1981), Hitler's architect and German Minister of Armaments from 1942 to 1945.

Speer joined the Nazi Party in 1931. Soon after the Nazis rose to national power in 1933, he was given his first large contracts from the party. His work caught Hitler's eye; the *Fuehrer* personally gave Speer assignments. Soon, the two developed a special relationship. Hitler gave Speer great freedoms, and Speer gave Hitler his complete allegiance.

In 1934 Speer became Hitler's personal architect. He was charged with creating architectural plans for Berlin (Hitler and Speer seemed to have the same taste in grandiose monuments) and building a permanent structure for party events. In 1937 Speer was named inspector general of construction in Berlin. In this position, he gained access to the apartments vacated by Berlin's Jews in 1939 and again in 1941, after deportations began to the east.

In 1942 Speer was named Minister of Armaments and in 1943 Minister of Armaments and War Production. In both these posts, he utilized forced laborers and confiscated Jewish property to achieve his goals. He raised armaments production to an extraordinary level, even as Allied air attacks were increasing.

By the end of the war, Speer and Hitler had fallen out. Speer even claimed that he planned to assassinate Hitler; however, he probably did not mean to go through with it.

After the war, Speer was put on trial by the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg. He was charged with war crimes and for using forced laborers and concentration camp prisoners in his work. Unlike most other war crimes defendants, Speer admitted responsibility for the actions of the Nazis, even those he claimed he was not directly aware of. Although he claimed that he knew nothing about the mass exterminations in Eastern Europe, Speer expressed regret for his crimes. He was found guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity, and sentenced to 20 years in prison---presumably, a light sentence due to his admission of guilt and regret. After his release, Speer

published his memoirs, in which he once again expressed remorse for his actions.