

## ADOLF HITLER

### *On His Hopes for Germany in 1914, from Mein Kampf*

1925

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*In August 1914 at the start of World War I, Adolf Hitler, an Austrian by birth, joined the Bavarian army and the German cause. Hitler reflected on his war experiences in his book Mein Kampf (My Struggle), written while he was in jail after his failed attempt to overthrow the Weimar Republic in November 1923. In this passage, Hitler clearly expresses the hopes for national unity and a decisive victory shared by millions of Germans in 1914. His comments help us understand his sense of humiliation and resentment over the defeat Germany was dealt in 1918.*

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The struggle of the year 1914 was not forced on the masses—no, by the living God—it was desired by the whole people.

People wanted at length to put an end to the general uncertainty. Only thus can it be understood that more than two million German men and boys thronged to the colors for this hardest of all struggles, prepared to defend the flag with the last drop of their blood.

To me those hours seemed like a release from the painful feelings of my youth. Even today I am not ashamed to say that, overpowered by stormy enthusiasm, I fell down on my knees and thanked Heaven from an overflowing heart for granting me the good fortune of being permitted to live at this time. . . .

For the last time in many years the people had a prophetic vision of its own future. Thus, right at the beginning of the gigantic struggle the necessary grave undertone entered into the ecstasy of an overflowing enthusiasm; for this knowledge alone made the national uprising more than a mere blaze of straw. The earnestness was only too necessary; for in those days people in general had not the faintest conception of the possible length and duration of the struggle that was now beginning. They dreamed of being home again that winter to continue and renew their peaceful labors. . . .

As a boy and young man I had so often felt the desire to prove at least once by deeds that for me national enthusiasm was no empty whim. It often seemed to me almost a sin to shout hurrah perhaps without having the inner right to do so; for who had the right to use this word without having proved it in the place where all playing is at an end and the inexorable hand of the Goddess of Destiny begins to weigh peoples and men according to the truth and

steadfastness of their convictions? Thus my heart, like that of a million others, overflowed with proud joy that at last I would be able to redeem myself from this paralyzing feeling. I had so often sung “*Deutschland über Alles*” and shouted “*Heil*” at the top of my lungs, that it seemed to me almost a belated act of grace to be allowed to stand as a witness in the divine court of the eternal judge and proclaim the sincerity of this conviction. For from the first hour I was convinced that in case of a war—which seemed to me inevitable—in one way or another I would at once leave my books. Likewise I knew that my place would then be where my inner voice directed me. . . .

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On the third of August, I submitted a personal petition to His Majesty, King Ludwig III,<sup>1</sup> with

a request for permission to enter a Bavarian regiment. The cabinet office certainly had plenty to do in those days; so much the greater was my joy to receive an answer to my request the very next day. With trembling hands I opened the document; my request had been approved and I was summoned to report to a Bavarian regiment. My joy and gratitude knew no bounds. A few days later I was wearing the tunic which I was not to doff until nearly six years later.

For me, as for every German, there now began the greatest and most unforgettable time of my earthly existence. Compared to the events of this gigantic struggle, everything past receded to shallow nothingness. Precisely in these days, with the tenth anniversary of the mighty event approaching, I think back with proud sadness on those first weeks of our people's heroic struggle, in which Fate graciously allowed me to take part.

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From Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), 161–64.

<sup>1</sup> Ludwig III was the last king of the German state of Bavaria. His reign ended when Germany was declared a republic in November 1918.