

FABRICATING THE DEATH OF ADOLF HITLER

The Hitler suicide story was used by the British as a weapon of psychological warfare to discredit National Socialism and stifle the German people's will to resist foreign occupation.

Part 3 of 3

by Giordan Smith © 2007

Email: giordansmith@gmail.com

The Soviets' futile search for the real Hitler corpse

The evidence I have discussed so far establishes that, during the last days of the Third Reich, multiple cremations were carried out in the Reich Chancellery grounds in front of sundry witnesses who had been persuaded to believe that the bodies they saw being cremated were those of Adolf and Eva Hitler. It would also appear that Heusemann and Echtmann, the two dental workers associated with Hitler's dentist, Professor Blaschke, deceived themselves into thinking that they possessed sufficient expertise to identify the human remains recovered by the Soviets as those of Adolf and Eva Hitler. The progress of the Soviet investigation was so rapid, however, that it had begun to fall apart even before the problems with Heusemann's and Echtmann's evidence could have been detected.

The Soviets' problems began on 8 May—the day the autopsy of the putative Hitler remains was carried out—when a "bullet-torn and battered body of a man identified as Hitler" was found in the ruins of the bunker.¹ An American war correspondent, Joseph ("Joe") W. Grigg, Jr, proudly announced from Berlin that Hitler's body had almost certainly been found. Grigg was soon forced to retract his scoop, however. On 10 May, he reported that "[f]our bodies, blackened and charred, that seem to answer to Hitler's general appearance have been dragged out of the [Chancellery] ruins". He observed that "none has been identified as being definitely that of the Nazi *Fuehrer*". Considering that within five days they had found six corpses, any one of which could have been Hitler's, Grigg's conclusion was appropriately pessimistic: "...the Russians are beginning to believe that no body that can be identified without any shadow of doubt as that of Adolf Hitler ever will be found now".²

It is no small indication of the difficulties the Soviets experienced that, within a month of being discovered, the corpses initially taken to be those of Hitler and his wife had been buried, unburied and reburied no less than three times. They were first buried at an undisclosed location near Berlin, then exhumed and moved to Finov in the Soviet Union, and then exhumed and reburied in Rathenau, Germany, on 3 June 1945. Nor did their travels end there. A month later, they were taken to Friedrichshagen, Germany, where one of Hitler's bodyguards, Harry Mengershausen, was asked to look at them for identification purposes. It would be hard to account for this macabre travelling show if the Soviets were sure that the bodies they had found were really those of the Hitler couple.

In early June, the substantial scale of the hoax became apparent when it was revealed that the bunker had been littered with bodies of numerous individuals dressed in Hitler's trousers. On 9 June, during a press conference attended by British, American, French and Russian reporters, the Soviet military commander Marshal Georgi K. Zhukov admitted that they had "found no corpses which could be Hitler's". The Soviet commandant of Berlin, Colonel-General Nikolai E. Bezarin, explained that the Russians had "...found several bodies in Hitler's Reich Chancellery with the *Fuehrer's* name on their clothes... In Hitler's Chancellery we found, in fact, too many bodies with his name on the clothes. It got to be a joke. Every time I would find a pair of pants I would say, 'These are Hitler's'." Zhukov told the reporters that he now considered it a serious possibility that Hitler had escaped Berlin by air. "He could have taken off at the very last moment, for there was an airfield at his disposal," he said.³

Strikingly, one of the planted corpses could have belonged to Hitler's arch-enemy, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, the duplicitous head of the *Abwehr* (German military intelligence) who was tried and sentenced to death for complicity in the 20 July 1944 assassination plot. In December 1950, Canaris's adjutant, Willy Jenke, told British author

Ian Colvin that he had just received fresh information about Canaris's fate from a former acquaintance, Johannes Toeppen, who had been the *Abwehr's* chief accountant. Toeppen told Jenke that "Canaris was seen in Berlin about April 20th [1945] under close escort and...that he was subsequently told that the Admiral had been shot and buried in a bomb crater on April 23rd at a time when Hitler was ordering some of the last executions".⁴ It would be incredibly ironic if the male corpse autopsied by the Soviets on 8 May 1945 had actually been that of Admiral Canaris.

By June 1945, the Soviets could be virtually certain that they had not found Hitler's corpse. From that point onwards, however, rather than acknowledging the prospect that Hitler's body might never be found, Stalin endorsed the idea that Hitler had escaped from the bunker. While attending the Potsdam Conference in Berlin in July 1945, during conversations with US Secretary of State James F. Byrnes and Fleet Admiral William D. Leahy, Chairman of the American Joint Chiefs of Staff, Stalin expressed the firm conviction that Hitler was still alive. In fact, in August 1945, he accused the British of "concealing the real, living Adolf Hitler in their sector of Berlin".⁵

The origins of the suicide legend

During the last week of April and first few days of May 1945, the world laboured under considerable uncertainty as to Hitler's whereabouts. Reports that Hitler had gone to Berlin to conduct the city's defence were dismissed as propaganda. Among numerous reports published concerning this subject, several claimed that Hitler was already dead. The first such report came from a "high diplomat" who had reached safety in Switzerland; on 28 April, he said that Hitler and Goebbels had been shot three days earlier.⁶ The next day, papers reported that according to a "high British source" Himmler had had Hitler poisoned.⁷

The first official pronouncement on Hitler's fate came at 10.27 pm on 1 May 1945, when Admiral Karl Doenitz declared over Hamburg radio that Hitler had "fallen at his command post in the Reich Chancery fighting to the last breath against Bolshevism and for Germany". Until they learned about this broadcast, the Allies apparently had not known that Hitler was dead. But the British accepted the idea with enthusiasm. "The Foreign Office took the view that it was 'extremely unlikely' Hitler's death would have been announced by the Germans if it had not actually occurred, the [anonymous Foreign Office] commentator said."⁸

While the certainty of the British media set the tone for other countries in the Empire, such as Canada and Australia, scepticism was widespread in the United States. An editorial in the *New York Times* cautioned:

"The Nazis have made lies so much a part of their politics, and the reports about Hitler's alleged doubles have been so widely spread, that these announcements are bound to leave in many minds that the master liar is attempting to perpetrate one last great hoax on the world in an effort to save himself, and perhaps prepare the way for his return at a later and more auspicious time."⁹

The *Salamanca Republican-Press* wrote in the same vein:

"The German radio is a creature of the Nazi regime, and one of the Nazi principles is that lying is not only permissible but praiseworthy if it will further Nazi purposes. Some such

announcement as this would be a natural ruse if Hitler decided to do what he has been reported to have planned to do—disappear, and 'go underground', there to plan further crimes."¹⁰

In his war column published on the same page, DeWitt Mackenzie asserted:

"The story of Hitler's death is almost to [sic] good to be true, and certainly can't be accepted until proof is forthcoming, because there's such a strong possibility of trickery."¹¹

A Gallup poll subsequently established that 68 per cent of those surveyed questioned whether Hitler was really dead.¹²

However, the question of whether Hitler was really dead was instantly eclipsed by the question of *how* he had died. This time, the *New York Times* was at the least sceptical end of the spectrum, asserting in its editorial column that "there seems to be no good reason to doubt that Hitler...died as the [German] announcement says he did".¹³ The editorial made the persuasive point that such a death would have helped "*perpetuate the legend* which formed the core of Nazi propaganda and by which [Hitler] rose to power—the legend that he and the Nazis were shining knights in armor fighting for European civilization against bolshevism—to their last breath." (My italics)

At the other extreme, a British Foreign Office spokesman dismissed the idea that Hitler had gone down fighting as the "most complete nonsense".¹⁴ To support this conclusion, the spokesman revealed that several days earlier, "Himmler was said to have given the information that Hitler was likely to die within 48 hours".¹⁵ He had given this information to a Swedish contact, Count Folke Bernadotte, who later claimed that on this occasion Himmler had told him that he planned to create "a Hitler legend which, after the fall of the Third Reich, would play the same part as the 'stab in the back' phrase after the peace of

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Versailles".¹⁶ If Himmler really had said this, Bernadotte must have relayed the information to the Allies very quickly, for, even before anyone could even be sure that Hitler was dead, the priority had shifted to insisting that Hitler "had met death in a manner which would thwart any die-hard Nazi attempt to build a Wagnerian legend about him".¹⁷

Intriguingly, an Associated Press report from London that was published in the *Toronto Globe and Mail* on 2 May 1945 asserted that Doenitz's claim that Hitler had died a hero's death had been denounced by a "ghost voice":

"Doenitz eulogized Hitler as a man who had dedicated his life to Germany and to warring against 'Bolshevism', and who now had died a 'hero's death'. A powerful ghost voice interrupted him, shouting: 'This is a lie!' The ghost voice continued to heckle throughout the Doenitz speech."¹⁸

Whether this report of a "ghost voice" is true or not, it shows that the Foreign Office was anxious from the first to cast doubt on claims that Hitler had died as a result of enemy action.

The next day, 3 May, probably at the request of his political adviser, John Wheeler-Bennett of the Royal Institute of International Affairs (the British equivalent of the Council on Foreign Relations), US General Dwight D. Eisenhower laid his considerable prestige behind what seemed at the time to be the best alternative theory of Hitler's demise. He backed up the Foreign Office statement, explaining that early on the morning of

24 April Himmler had told Count Bernadotte that Hitler was "a dying man" and that Himmler's intelligence chief, Walter Schellenberg, had told Bernadotte that Hitler was "suffering from a brain hemorrhage".¹⁹ Initially, therefore, the Allies inclined towards the view that Hitler had died of natural causes, in effect taking Himmler's word over Doenitz's. A BBC announcer also told the world that Hitler had died of a stroke—information that had been leaked that same day at the San Francisco conference by the British Foreign Minister, Sir Anthony Eden.²⁰

However, the Allies were not merely prejudiced from the start against any account of Hitler's fate that might have fuelled the enthusiasm of the Nazi underground resistance, but were also biased in favour of the *most ignominious account possible*. Thus the idea that Hitler had died a natural death began being deflated as soon as evidence emerged that Hitler had not been in bad health at all. On 7 May, the *Baltimore Sun* stated that according to Major Erwin Giesing (Hitler's brain, ear, nose and throat specialist, who had seen him on 15 February 1945), Hitler had been "in unusually good physical condition for a man of his age" and had certainly not died of a brain haemorrhage.²¹ Reports pouring cold water on the theory that Hitler had been ill and had probably died a natural death or had been euthanased continued to be published whenever the opportunity arose.²²

But what really brought about the rapid demise of the natural death theory were the revelations of the most important member of the regime to have been captured alive thus far: Dr Hans Fritzsche.

Dr Fritzsche, Goebbels's deputy in the Propaganda Ministry and Germany's leading radio propagandist, was taken into custody by the Soviets on 2 May after he had formally handed the city over to them in a ceremony in the Tiergarten. The next morning, 3 May, the Soviets issued a communiqué stating that Dr Fritzsche had made a deposition in which he declared that Hitler, Dr Goebbels and General Hans Krebs had all committed suicide in the bunker.²³ Although the Soviets were duly sceptical—Moscow state radio suggested that it was "another Fascist trick" designed to facilitate Hitler's escape—the suicide story was at once taken up by the western press.²⁴

Intriguingly, there is evidence that the public was preconditioned to accept the suicide theory. As early as 31 March 1945, the *Globe and Mail* published a Canadian Press report headlined "Expect Hitler To Be Suicide". Dated "Emmerich, March 30", the piece stated that a rumour was current among German troops to the effect that Hitler would commit suicide. In any event, the suicide story was an immense boon to Anglo-American propaganda, since Hitler's resort to suicide could be used to convey a message about the nature of Nazism itself:

"When the American journalist William L. Shirer, who had been living as a correspondent in Berlin until 1941, learned of Hitler's death by suicide in the bunker of the Reich Chancellery on 30 April 1945, he declared: 'In fact, I have always been certain myself that that was what he wanted to do in the end,' thereby seeing the Third Reich as an ultimately suicidal regime."²⁵

The suicide theory was also a weapon of psychological warfare on the German population. To understand the propaganda impact of the Hitler suicide legend on the German mind, it is important to understand that, for many if not most Germans, the idea that Hitler had taken his own life was deeply repugnant as it contradicted everything they believed he had stood for. When General Krebs gave him the news, General Helmuth Weidling recalled thinking: "So we have been fighting for five-and-a-half years for someone who committed suicide. Having drawn us into this terrible disaster, he himself chose the easy way out and left us to fend for ourselves."²⁶

At the other end of the military hierarchy, sixteen-year-old Dieter Borkowski, who had been among the Hitler Youth recruits fighting to defend Berlin to the last, felt drained of the desire to live. "These words make me feel sick, as if I have to vomit," he wrote. "I think that my life has no sense any more. What was this battle for, what were the deaths of so many people for? Life has apparently become worthless, for if Hitler has shot himself, the Russians will have finally won... Has the Fuehrer not betrayed his own *Volk* then after all?"²⁷

The suicide legend was therefore used to discredit Hitler in the eyes of his own followers and stifle their urge to resist foreign occupation.

There was so much haste to assign to Hitler what was thought to be a fitting end that few people stopped to ask such obvious questions as how Dr Fritzsche knew that Hitler had committed suicide, whether the Soviets could have pressured him into saying this, or whether the suicide story could have been a cover story for Hitler's escape. Given Dr Fritzsche's status as the most important man in the *Propagandaministerium* after Dr Goebbels, it is self-evident that nothing he told the Soviets immediately after the regime collapsed can be regarded as free of the possibility of propagandistic deception. Yet in London and Washington, where throughout the war the view had been taken that the Nazis were unconscionable liars, there was a dramatic shift away from scepticism. The idea that Hitler had committed suicide was so appealing that any Nazi

who claimed to know that Hitler had committed suicide never risked having his or her veracity impugned. Clearly, all Nazis were liars—except those who told the Allies what they wanted to hear.

Operation Trevor-Roper

The fact that Hitler's corpse had apparently not been found in Berlin caused considerable consternation in the Western press. A *Toronto Daily Star* editorial commented anxiously on 18 July:

"It is becoming apparent that indisputable proof of Hitler's death either during the past ten weeks or at some early future date, if he should still be alive, is highly desirable for psychological as well as for practical reasons. *Unless his demise is beyond argument...the world is in for a potentially dangerous Hitler legend*. This might become a psychological weapon in the efforts of German leaders eventually to restore the self-confidence and revive the truculence of this people who for so long have been

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intolerable disturbers of international peace."²⁸ (My italics)

Indeed, the very title of the editorial, "To Destroy Hitler, Whether Man or Myth", implies that it was considered as important to destroy Hitler "the myth" as Hitler "the man".

By mid-1945, the public was being asked to choose between a proliferating number of escape stories and the suicide theory. Given that the escape stories were outlandish if not often patently ridiculous, the public was given the impression that only the suicide theory had any evidence to support it and deserved to be taken seriously.

The British response to the burgeoning Hitler escape stories was not long in coming. In September 1945, Brigadier Dick White, commander of the Intelligence Bureau in the British Zone of Occupation, commissioned Major Hugh Trevor-Roper, a young Oxford-trained historian who, since 1943, had supervised the work of the Secret Intelligence Service's Radio Intelligence Section (RIS), to investigate, at least ostensibly, the circumstances of Hitler's alleged death. This was the opening phase of the British establishment's fabrication of a narrative of the last days of the Third Reich that made short work of Hitler "the myth".

Given that his only previous publication was a biography of a 17th-century English archbishop, William Laud, and that he neither read nor spoke German, Trevor-Roper was a curious choice for such a task. What's more, as the world saw in the 1980s, he authenticated the spurious "Hitler Diaries", even though the task of determining the authenticity of a single document would have been much simpler than that of establishing the truth about Hitler's demise.

During the last three months of 1945, according to the official story, Trevor-Roper and a team of intelligence agents travelled through Germany, tracking down and interrogating bunker survivors. However, this procedure did not bear a great deal of fruit, probably because most survivors were interned in Soviet prisons and concentration camps. In addition to uncovering the alleged diary of Hitler's valet Heinz Linge, Trevor-Roper achieved only one coup: scoring interviews with Gerda Christian, who had been one of Hitler's secretaries, and Else Krueger, who had been Bormann's secretary.

Surprisingly, Trevor-Roper seems not to have interviewed any witnesses who had fallen into American hands, which means the better part of those to be found outside Soviet prisons. It appears that instead of allowing him to meet with them, American intelligence operatives interviewed them and passed copies of their reports to him. In one particularly flagrant case, the Americans furnished Trevor-Roper with partly fabricated testimony; in another, they supplied information that had been obtained in such unusual conditions that it, too, must be considered suspect.

The first case was that of the famous German aviatrix Hanna Reitsch. In an interview with Ron Laytner that she authorised for publication only after her death, Reitsch stated explicitly that at least part of the account attributed to her in *The Last Days of Hitler* had been fabricated:

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"When I was released by the Americans I read historian Trevor-Roper's book, 'The Last Days of Hitler'. Throughout the book like a red line, runs an eyewitness report by Hanna Reitsch about the final days in the bunker. I never said it. I never wrote it. I never signed it. It was something they invented. Hitler died with total dignity."²⁹

This report, dated 8 October 1945, was written by Reitsch's interrogator, Captain Robert E. Work (Air Division, Headquarters, United States Forces in Austria, Air Interrogation Unit), and published for the first time in, of all places, *Public Opinion Quarterly* in 1946–47.³⁰

The second case was that of nurse Erna Flegel. On 23 November 1945, several American intelligence agents took Flegel out for a six-course dinner, the result of which was a five-page statement in English which is presented as a summary of the information she allegedly imparted during her "interrogation". However, Flegel neither wrote the statement herself nor signed it.³¹ In fact, no one can be said to vouch for this document

because, despite its having been declassified, the names of the persons responsible for it, including the name of the agency for which they worked, remain blacked out.

If this approach was typical, then Trevor-Roper's chief sources were summaries of information that had already been predigested for him by American intelligence operatives—involving what distortions and attempts at ironing out inconsistencies we will probably never know. Given that there were few bunker survivors in British hands and that Trevor-Roper had no access to bunker survivors in Soviet hands, his task basically appears to have been that of creating

a coherent narrative out of information that he was being spoonfed and that he had no means of assessing himself. There is no reason to believe that any of the evidence that reached Trevor-Roper did so with the active consent of the witnesses. My impression is that in 1945, captured Nazis were little more than the puppets of their Allied captors; they could be made to say anything their captors wanted them to say, and if they objected there was nothing they could do about it anyway.

Strikingly, Trevor-Roper made his "conclusions" public less than two months after he'd begun investigating the case. At a press conference on 1 November 1945, Trevor-Roper (who remained anonymous at this stage and was referred to in print merely as "a young British intelligence officer") presented reporters with a statement that consisted of little more than a narrative of the last week or so of Hitler's life. It described how Hitler had committed suicide, probably by shooting himself in the mouth.³² Although Trevor-Roper told the reporters that so far he had spoken to about 20 witnesses, *the statement did not name even one of them*. Nonetheless, reporters probably left the conference under the erroneous impression that the version of Hitler's last days that he had provided was backed up by the testimony of multiple witnesses. Yet he had not found a single new eyewitness to the critical events—Hitler's suicide and cremation; all he had done was take Kempka's testimony as gospel truth and discount Karnau's.

The final section of the Trevor-Roper statement rejected

theories that Hitler could have escaped Berlin. In this section, it becomes glaringly obvious that his investigation had been designed to lead to predetermined conclusions. Here we learn, first of all, that Trevor-Roper assumed that Hitler's fate had been entirely determined by last-minute contingencies. According to this line of reasoning, Hitler could not have escaped the Chancellery because this or that avenue of escape had been rendered impossible (or at least difficult, which for Trevor-Roper appeared to mean the very same thing). Trevor-Roper circumscribed Hitler's exit possibilities by means of generalisations that are all extremely questionable. He wrote, for example, that it would have been impossible for Hitler to have been flown out of Berlin because his "two pilots" remained in the bunker and "took part in the attempted escape on the night of 1 May".³³ This is all very well, so long as you presuppose that Hitler would never have permitted anyone else to fly him out of Berlin or that one of the pilots could not have left the bunker and returned to it afterwards.

Trevor-Roper confined his discussion of Hitler's escape possibilities to planes and cars. However, in January 1946, General Helmuth Weidling, who was interned in a Soviet prison camp, furnished a long statement for the Soviets in which he conceded that he had grown sceptical about the suicide theory. He had meditated on the problem of Hitler's escape possibilities and concluded:

"On the night of 29/30 April there were still opportunities to leave—through the Zoo underground station in western Berlin and through the Friedrichstrasse station in the north. One could have escaped relatively safely through the underground tunnels."³⁴

Can we really believe that this possibility never occurred to Trevor-Roper? Since it's unlikely that he did not know that Berlin possessed an extensive underground railway system, it seems that the only escape possibilities Trevor-Roper was interested in talking about were those he could exclude.

Perhaps Trevor-Roper's most conspicuous flaw was his haste to discount the possibility that the eyewitnesses could have put their heads together to work up a coherent story to cover up for Hitler's escape. In his report, he commented:

"It is considered quite impossible that the versions of the various eye-witnesses can represent a concerted cover story; they were all too busy planning their own safety to have been able or disposed to learn an elaborate charade, which they could still maintain after five months of isolation from each other, and under detailed and persistent cross-examination."³⁵

This argument makes about as much sense as the claim that there can be no such thing as an orchestra because there is no way that a large number of people could ever perform a complex piece of music such as a symphony at the same time. In any case, the "charade" was hardly that "elaborate". As we saw in part one, there are many significant differences between the recollections of the various eyewitnesses. The SS orchestra was playing the same tune, to be sure, but not always in the same key.

Kempka unravelled

Operation Trevor-Roper is best seen, therefore, not as a bona fide investigation of Hitler's fate but as the major stage in the

British plan to enshrine anti-Nazi propaganda as historical fact. As we saw in part one, the first eyewitnesses to go public were Hitler's chauffeur Erich Kempka and RSD bodyguard Hermann Karnau. After Kempka's veracity was called into question by Karnau's claims, Karnau's story virtually disappeared and Kempka's story was extolled as the more authoritative. Indeed, Kempka's evidence not only became the basis for Trevor-Roper's book but Kempka was also endorsed at Nuremberg as the sole source of reliable information concerning Hitler's demise.

The primary reason Kempka's story won such a positive reception from the Anglo-American authorities was that Kempka was the sole source of evidence that appeared to support the suicide theory (Karnau simply referred to the cremation he had witnessed). Kempka also contradicted Soviet claims that Hitler could have escaped. In his 4 July 1945 interview record, he declared:

"[With a] statement reported to have been made by the Russian Marshall Chukov [*sic*] that Hitler and Eva Braun could have escaped from the Berlin area by air, I can't agree. On 4/30/45 and two or three days previous, no one could possibly have left the inner parts of Berlin by air. There was a heavy artillery fire on all the inner parts of Berlin during those days. Neither did I hear about a plane arriving or leaving after the 25th or 26th of April 1945."³⁶

Unfortunately for Kempka, one of the best-attested events of the last days of the Third Reich is that of a flight piloted by General Robert Ritter von Greim and Hanna Reitsch that arrived in Berlin on the morning of 26 April. The same pair took off from Berlin in the early hours of 29 April. Reitsch herself not only spoke about the two flights on numerous occasions between

1945 and her death in 1979 but also devoted a chapter to them in her autobiography *Flying Is My Life*.³⁷ Given that the evidence from other sources is abundant enough to establish that they actually took place, there is something extremely suspicious about Kempka's assertion that no such flights would have been possible.

There is no reason to jump to the conclusion, however tempting, that Kempka must have lied about being in the Chancellery during the regime's final days. He could have been temporarily absent from the bunker on a mission. If so, he had returned by the afternoon of 30 April. As we saw in part one, several eyewitnesses have provided evidence establishing Kempka's presence at a cremation held in the Chancellery garden at around 3.00 pm that afternoon. SS-*Hauptsturmfuehrer* Karl Schneider acknowledged speaking to Kempka at the Chancellery garage on the evening of 1 May. He told the Soviets on 19 May 1945 that on this occasion Kempka had told him that Hitler was "allegedly dead".³⁸

The explanation that best accounts for events, therefore, is that Kempka sought to suppress his knowledge of the two flights. When Kempka first gave his story to the Americans in June 1945, he had no reason to believe that they knew anything at all about them. There is a very good reason why Kempka would not have wanted to mention these flights: the cover story—that Greim flew to Berlin to receive instructions from Hitler, who had just made him the new head of the *Luftwaffe*—is preposterous. Why would Hitler, who was anxious for everyone else to leave Berlin, want someone to come to him? Why would he have been so keen to talk to the head of an almost nonexistent entity? The official story fails to justify Greim

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and Reitsch's extremely dangerous flight. It also does not explain why the pair's flight from the *Luftwaffe* air base at Rechlin near Berlin to Gatow airport on Berlin's periphery was accompanied by an escort of 30–40 fighter jets—in other words, the extant *Luftwaffe* virtually in its entirety. Clearly, the flight had a more serious purpose than we have been led to believe. One writer believes that Greim and Reitsch ferried Martin Bormann out of Berlin.³⁹

However, in a striking passage in his memoirs, former *Volkssturm* member Dieter H. B. Protsch relates an incident that took place in Berlin on 29 April 1945. That day, which happened to be his thirteenth birthday, in the course of searching for food for his family he stumbled upon a basement occupied by several *Waffen-SS* men operating radio equipment who gave him bread and chocolate:

"After some small talk about the family, they suddenly stopped talking when the radio operator raised his hand to demand quiet. The 'Funker' (Radio Operator), wearing a head set, started smiling and stated that 'der Fuehrer' got his belated birthday present. He explained further that he [Hitler] made it safely out of Berlin, flown out by his personal pilot Hanna Reitsch, Germany's best female test pilot. The report stated that she was flying a small one engine, two or three seater plane, a so-called 'Fiseler [sic] Storch'."⁴⁰

Thus the truth seems to be that, exactly as the Soviets subsequently alleged, Hitler did indeed make it out of Berlin—more or less around the time that the official story tells us that he was still in the bunker dictating his Political Testament—and that Erich Kempka knew precisely when and how this had taken place, but withheld the information from the Americans.

According to Reitsch, the flight reached Rechlin at about 3.00 am. Here, she states, Greim attended a conference. Then she and Greim flew—apparently using a different aircraft—to Ploen, a distance of some 400 miles. Their next destinations were Dobbin, where Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel was,⁴¹ Luebeck, Ploen again ("to see Doenitz"), and finally Koeniggratz (in Bohemia, now Hradec Králové in the Czech Republic).⁴² If we assume, as I think we should, that Hitler was present during at least the first of these several stages, we can say that at Rechlin the trail goes cold.

If Hitler left Berlin with Greim and Reitsch, then that would account for the series of bizarre events—the marriage to Eva Braun, the writing of the Political Testament, the recurring rages—that have been enshrined in official history as "the last days of the Third Reich". Obviously, Hitler's last days in the bunker needed to be accounted for, and so a lurid series of episodes had to be invented to fill in the yawning gap.

This three-part series has not tried to resolve the many questions raised by these bizarre episodes for the obvious reason that they all depend on an underlying assumption—that Hitler committed suicide in the bunker—which we feel we have shown to be nothing but a propagandist fiction.

About the Author:

Giordan Smith is an independent academic from Sydney, Australia, with a special interest in modern German history. He can be contacted by email at giordansmith@gmail.com.

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Endnotes

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22. For example, Field Marshal Kesselring, who had last seen Hitler in mid-April when "he appeared in excellent health"; Howard Cowan, "Kesselring Most Surprised Hitler Remained In Berlin", *Hamilton Spectator*, 10 May 1945
23. *Globe and Mail*, 3 May 1945; *Hamilton Spectator*, 3 May 1945
24. *Globe and Mail*, 3 May 1945
25. Christian Goeschel, "Suicide at the End of the Third Reich", *Journal of Contemporary History* 2006; 41(1), p. 155
26. V. K. Vinogradov et al. (eds), *Hitler's Death: Russia's Last Great Secret from the Files of the KGB*, Chaucer Press, London, 2005, p. 236
27. Cited in Omer Bartov, *Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1991, p. 110
28. "To Destroy Hitler, Whether Man or Myth", *Toronto Daily Star*, 18 July 1945
29. Ron Laytner, "The First Astronaut Was A Woman", Edit International, <http://www.editinternational.com/printstory.php?cat=42f3cd58d6fc1&sub=44ee0674d77d6>
30. Robert E. Work, "Last Days in Hitler's Air Raid Shelter", *Public Opinion Quarterly* 1946–1947 Winter; 10(4):565–81. A different translation of the same report is included in *Hitler's Death*, although without the least acknowledgement that Reitsch had repudiated it.
31. The complete document can be viewed online at: www.thesmokinggun.com/archive/nurseflegel1.html
32. "Text of British Report Holding Hitler Ended His Life", *New York Times*, 1 November 1945

33. *ibid.*
34. *Hitler's Death*, p. 238. I would observe that a *living* Hitler did not need to escape Berlin; for example, a courier carrying a box with the *Fuehrer's* ashes in it could have taken it out of the city.
35. "Text of British Report Holding Hitler Ended His Life", *New York Times*, 1 November 1945
36. <http://www.nizkor.org/ftp.cgi/amt/nca/nca-06/nca-06-3735-ps>
37. See Hanna Reitsch, "The Last Journey to Berlin", in *Flying Is My Life*, Putnam's Sons, New York, 1954, pp. 220–37. The Greim–Reitsch flights were not even the only flights in and out of central Berlin in this period. In her book, Reitsch refers to at least two others.
38. *Hitler's Death*, p. 43.
39. Carter P. Hydrick, *Critical Mass: The Real Story of the Birth of the Atomic Bomb and the Nuclear Age*, 1998, available online at: <http://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/ciencia/atom/icbomb/chap12.htm>
40. Dieter H. B. Protsch, *Be All You Can Be: From a Hitler Youth in WWII to a US Army Green Beret*, Trafford Publishing, 2004, p. 32
41. Keitel confirms in his memoirs, p. 261, that he was at Dobbin this day, thus confirming Reitsch's reliability. He adds the striking information, which Reitsch does not mention, that Himmler was at Dobbin, too. Wilhelm Keitel, *In The Service Of The Reich: The Memoirs of Field Marshal Keitel*, ed. Walter Goerlitz, Focal Point Publications, London, 2003
42. Reitsch, *Flying Is My Life*, pp. 235–36