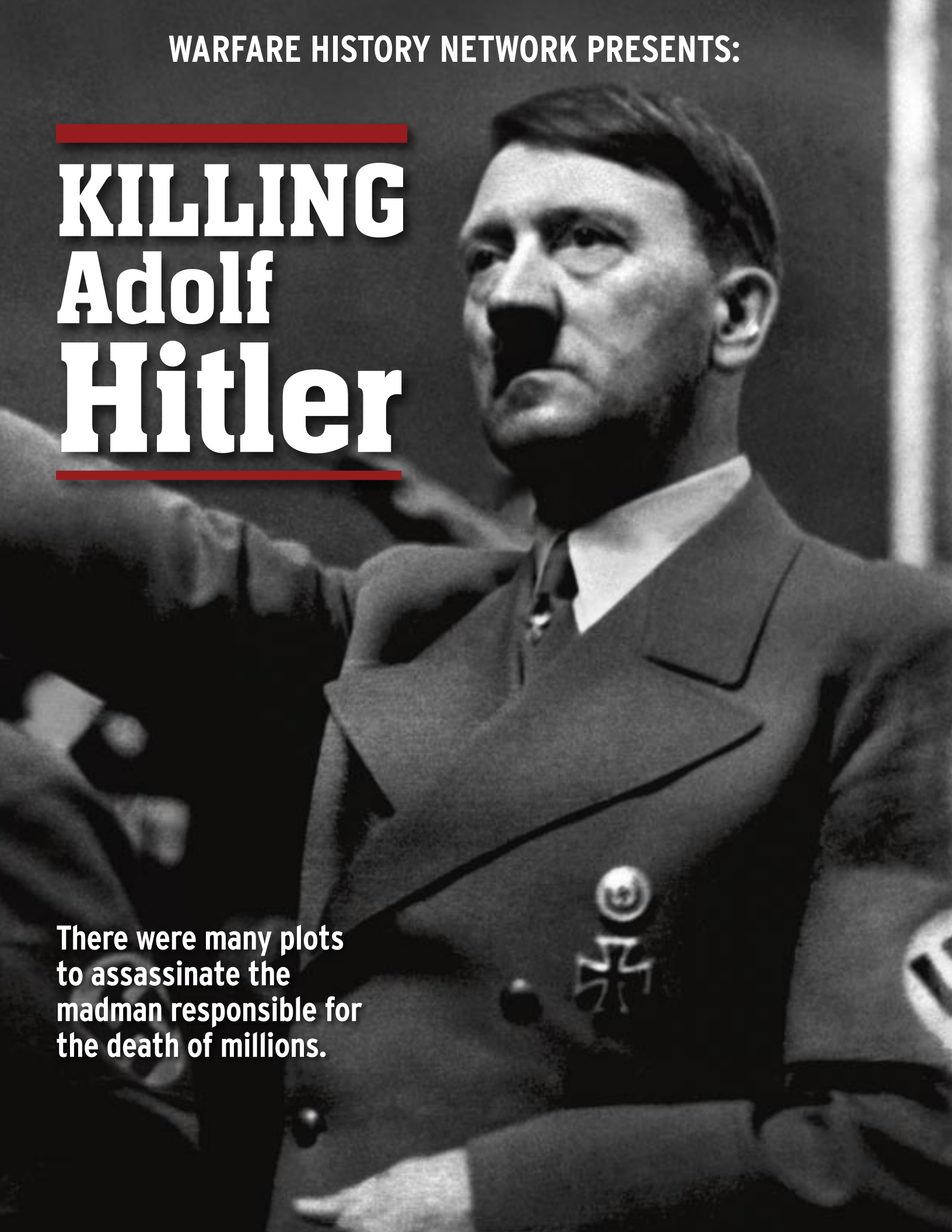
WARFARE HISTORY NETWORK PRESENTS:

KILLING Adolf Hitler



There were many plots to assassinate the madman responsible for the death of millions.

Warfare History Network Presents:

Killing Adolf Hitler

Hitler's Close Call

BRITISH PRIVATE HENRY TANDEY HELD HIS FIRE ON A GROUP OF GERMANS IN WORLD WAR I. ONE OF THEM WAS ADOLF HITLER.

By Robert Barr Smith

Private Henry Tandey had a clear shot at the German soldier. He was so close that he could look his enemy in the eyes. Tandey could not have missed. But the man was wounded; one account of that far away day in 1918 says that the German was lying bleeding on the ground. In any case, the German soldier made no move to resist; he simply stared at the Englishman. Tandey eased off the trigger of his Enfield and did not fire. "I took aim," said Tandey later, "but couldn't shoot a wounded man. So I let him go."

Maybe he shouldn't have.

The German soldier went on his way, and Tandey went his. No doubt the Englishman forgot all about the man he had spared, because Tandey still had a war to fight. And not long afterward, Tandey got the welcome news that he had been awarded his nation's highest medal for gallantry, the Victoria Cross (VC). He would receive his cross at Buckingham Palace in December 1919, at the hands of King George V himself.

Tandey won the VC near a French town called Marcoing, which lay about seven kilometers southwest of Cambrai, on September 28, 1918, when his company was held up by heavy German machine-gun fire. Tandey crawled forward, leading a Lewis Gun team, and knocked out the German position. He then pushed on to the Schelde Canal, a

Holding the Menin Cross Roads, a painting by Italian artist Fortunino Matania, shows British private Henry Tandey carrying a wounded comrade. German Chancellor Adolf Hitler told British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain that Tandey had spared his life when he was a soldier in World War I.

broad embanked stream. Some small British elements had crossed the canal on a set of lock gates and a wrecked railway bridge, but more troops were needed quickly on the other bank.

However, as German resistance stiffened, the canal obstructed his unit's advance, and Tandey reached the bank of the canal to find an impassable break in the planking of a bridge spanning 50 yards of water. Tandey worked under heavy fire to cover the gap in the bridge with planks and open the way for the rest of his unit to cross.

Tandey, who served in the Green Howards Regiment, was a recipient of the Victoria Cross.

In ferocious fighting later the same day, Tandey and eight other men were cut off behind German lines. Vastly outnumbered, Tandey still led his handful in a wild bayonet charge that smashed into the Germans and drove them back against the rest of Tandey's unit, which took 37 prisoners. Wounded twice, Tandey went on to lead his men in a search of dugouts, winkling out and capturing more than 20 additional Germans. Only then would Tandey stand down and get his wounds dressed. Badly hurt, for the third time in the war, he was on his way to a hospital in England.

Tandey was born in 1891, in Leamington, Warwickshire. The son of a stonemason who had also soldiered for Britain, he became a professional soldier, a tough, long-service infantryman who survived four years of bitter war in Belgium and France. Nicknamed "Napper," Tandey was not a large man, standing less than five feet, six inches, and weighing just under 120 pounds. But what he lacked in stature, Napper Tandey made up in grit and high courage.

Back in 1910, he had enlisted in Alexandra, Princess of Wale's Own Yorkshire Regiment, commonly known as the Green Howards. Beginning life as the 19th Regiment of Foot, the Green Howards were a famous outfit named for the color of their uniform facings and the name of their first colonel. It distinguished them from another famous regiment commanded by a different Howard, which wore buff-colored facings. During the war, that regiment would win its own fame simply as the Buffs, the East Kent Regiment.

Tandey had served with the 2nd Battalion of the Green Howards in South Africa and on the island of Guernsey before the war. He was a tough, able soldier, and by the time of his exploit at Marcoing he had already been five times "mentioned in despatches," a peculiarly British means of honoring high achievement under fire. He had also won the Distinguished Conduct Medal while commanding a bombing party. On that occasion, he rushed a German post with just two soldiers to help him, killing several of the enemy and capturing 20 more.

Tandey also held the Military Medal for heroism under fire. This decoration he won at a place called Havricourt in the fall of 1918, where he carried a wounded man to safety under heavy fire and organized a party to bring in still more wounded. Then, again in command of a bombing party, he met and broke a strong German attack, driving the enemy back, as his citation read, "in confusion."

He had been wounded on the bloody Somme in 1916 and shipped back to England to recover. Once on his feet again, he joined the 9th Battalion of the Green Howards, with which he was again shot up at Passchendaele in the fall of 1917. After some time in the hospital in England, it was back to France, this time with the 12th Battalion of the regiment. When the 12th Battalion was disbanded in July 1918, Tandey was attached to the 5th Battalion of the Duke of Wellington's (West Riding) Regiment, and it was with this outfit that he won his VC.

After the war, Tandey soldiered on with the 2nd Battalion of the Duke of Wellington's, serving in Gibraltar, Turkey, and Egypt. In 1920 he was one of 50 VC holders who served as a guard of honor inside Westminster Abbey during the ceremonial burial of Britain's Unknown Soldier.

In January 1926, he was discharged as a sergeant, at that time the most heavily decorated enlisted man in the British Army. He spent the next 38 years in his home town of Leamington, where he married and worked as a "commissionaire" or security man for Standard Motor Company. A modest, quiet man, he talked little about the war.

With his fighting days well behind him, Tandey's war should have been over. But it wasn't. About the time of the award of his VC, a painting appeared, a graphic image of war by Italian artist and illustrator Fortunino Matania. Matania had included Tandey in his painting of soldiers at the Menin Cross Roads in 1914, not far from the battered Flemish town of Ypres. Tandey is facing the viewer, carrying a wounded soldier on his back, and the painting

Adolf Hitler, right, as a corporal in the Bavarian 16th Reserve Infantry Regiment. "I was sorry to God I let him go," Tandey said.

also shows other men of the Green Howards and a wounded German prisoner.

Matania's vivid painting became something far more than a picture, all because of the man who acquired a copy of it. For in 1938, then British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain made his futile attempt to guarantee "peace in our time." Flying to Germany to meet Hitler in the Alps, he was entertained at the Eagle's Nest, perched on the Kehlstein Rock high above the town of Berchtesgaden. And there, displayed on a wall of that ostentatious aerie, was a copy of Matania's painting. It was a curious choice of art for Hitler since it showed only British troops, but Hitler soon explained.

Hitler pointed to Tandey, commenting to Chamberlain, "That man came so near to killing me that I thought I should never see Germany again, providence saved me from such devilishly accurate fire as those English boys were aiming at us."

Then Hitler went a step further. I want you to pass on my best wishes and thanks to the soldier in that painting, he said, and Chamberlain replied that he would contact the man when he returned to England. The prime minster was as good as his word. Only then did Tandey find out that the pitiful wounded man he had spared, the bedraggled German corporal in the Bavarian 16th Reserve Infantry Regiment, was now the chancellor of Germany, on his way to becoming the ogre of Europe.

Tandey's relatives remembered the telephone call from Chamberlain. When Tandey returned from talking to the prime minister, he related the tale of Chamberlain seeing the painting. The prime minister told him, he said, that Hitler had pointed to Tandey's picture and said, "That's the man who nearly shot me."

Now Hitler probably would have known the name of the British soldier who spared his life. For the copy of the Matania painting on his wall at the Adlerhorst had come to Berchtesgaden from the British Army about 1937. Colonel M. Earle, an officer of the Grenadier Guards, had furnished the copy through a most unlikely intermediary, a German doctor then resident in Siam.

Earle had commanded the first battalion of the Grenadiers, and his unit had been in the line next to the Green Howards during the bitter fighting around the Menin Cross Roads. Badly wounded and captured at the end of October 1914, he was treated by a young German doctor named Schwend, whom Earle believed had saved his life. Schwend contacted Colonel Earle in the mid-1930s through a British lawyer also living in Bangkok, and he and Earle carried on a continuing correspondence.

In his letters to Earle the doctor remembered the terrible losses his unit suffered from the murderous British rifle fire in the Ypres area. "There is no doubt," the doctor wrote to the colonel, "that at the beginning of the war the British army was greatly under estimated....You will find in all the personal and official reports of our Division what a bad shock to our morale it was for our troops to find out in the very first days that the enemy was *really superior* to us in fighting experience.... We had the most severe losses for days and days, and most of our men had not seen the enemy.... I have seen some of those young volunteers crying in despair that they were shot down from 'nowhere,' and that they had not seen an Englishman."

And in passing, Schwend also commented that Hitler's unit had been fighting in the German line directly opposite the Green Howards.

Earle, feeling a deep sense of obligation to the German who had fought for his life near the Menin Cross Roads, pondered the Matania painting. "It occurred to me," he wrote in the *Green Howards Gazette,* "that if I could obtain a copy for Dr. Schwend it might compensate him for not having been able to see the Green Howards in the flesh 22 years ago."

Earle sent the copy of the painting to Schwend, who thanked him profusely in a letter dated January 8, 1937. The colonel and the doctor would later stand together by the Menin Gate, on which are inscribed the names of

56,000 British dead, listening to a bugler play the last post in the gathering dusk.

Some time after Earle sent his gift to the doctor, the photo made its way to Berchtesgaden, to the Adlerhorst high on Kehlstein Rock. One of Hitler's adjutants wrote to Earle in thanks. This officer—called in one source Captain Weidman—was surely Captain Fritz Wiedemann, Hitler's superior officer in World War I. Wiedemann served as Hitler's Army adjutant from 1937 on—der Führer had one from each service—until Wiedemann was fired four years later for disagreeing with Hitler once too often. This is what Wiedemann wrote, here in translation: "I beg to acknowledge your friendly gift ... sent to Berlin through the good offices of Dr. Schwend. The Führer is naturally very interested in things connected with his own war experiences, and he was obviously moved when I showed him the picture and explained the thought which you had in causing it to be sent to him. He has directed me to send you his best thanks for your friendly gift which is so rich in memories."

Surely a painting of British troops would not arouse such excitement in Hitler for its own sake. Nor would he have been so pleased to have a copy unless it meant something very special to him. There was plenty of excellent and graphic war art available, paintings and photographs showing German troops in action, copies of which Hitler could have easily had in Germany, simply for the asking. And if the story of his comment to Neville Chamberlain is true, the German chancellor recognized Tandey as a man who had spared his life.

The story of Tandey and Hitler first appeared in the British tabloid newspaper *Sunday Graphic* in December 1940, and has been the subject of some controversy since. Inevitably, there have been questions raised whether the battlefield meeting of Tandey and Hitler ever happened at all. There appears to be some evidence that Hitler was on leave when his unit and Tandey's fought in the Marcoing sector. Moreover, at least one knowledgeable writer tells that Hitler's unit was not close to Marcoing at the time Tandey won his VC.

It has also been suggested that the meeting, if in fact it occurred, might well have happened during the Ypres fighting in 1914, for that is the time portrayed in the Matania painting that Hitler admired. Tandey might indeed have spared Hitler during the Battle of First Ypres, for he later told journalists that he had on occasion held his fire to spare wounded German soldiers before the Marcoing fighting in 1918.

One writer speculates that the whole legend may be "purely a Hitler-based story," since Hitler held the British soldier in high esteem. He might also have wanted to butter up the British prime minister with flattering remarks about the British Army. And Hitler might have transposed the British soldier who spared his life into Tandey, intentionally or otherwise. Maybe so.

And certainly skepticism is natural, for the element of coincidence in this story is almost too good to be true. But not quite. While many German records of World War I were later destroyed in the bombings of World War II, there is no dispute that both Tandey's battalion of the Green Howards and Hitler's unit—the 16th Bavarian Reserve Infantry Regiment—were present in the fighting around Ypres in 1914 and Hitler was wounded in that area. Moreover, Dr. Schwend remembered that the 16th Bavarians fought opposite the Green Howards at the Menin Cross Roads and were in action there on October 29.

It is also significant that Tandey believed the story—for the rest of his days he was haunted by the thought that his merciful gesture might have cost the world untold misery and millions of wanton murders. This compassionate man could not forget what might have been avoided had he squeezed his trigger and shot down that wounded German.

Tandey was living in Coventry during the Luftwaffe's terrible attack on the city in November 1940. His own home was destroyed by German bombs, curiously leaving intact only a memorial clock given to him by the Old Contemptibles Association, a group of veterans of the First British Expeditionary Force that served during August-November 1914. On that same dreadful night the Luftwaffe destroyed Coventry Cathedral.

Tandey saw firsthand the resulting destruction, misery, and death and he worked with others to help pull survivors from the rubble of the city. He is said to have told a journalist at about that time, "If only I had known what he would turn out to be. When I saw all the people, women and children he had killed and wounded I was sorry to God I let him go."

Henry Tandey would return to duty during World War II as a recruiting sergeant after doctors rejected him for active service on the basis of his old wounds. On the 60th anniversary of the Battle of the Somme, he shared the reviewing stand during a Leamington parade honoring the men who had fought along that bloody river. A little more than a year later, he passed away in Coventry at the age of 86. Although Tandey had specified that his funeral

was to be private, it was nevertheless attended by the mayors of both Leamington and Coventry.

Tandey lies today in Marcoing's British Cemetery. He was cremated and wished to have his ashes scattered across the Marcoing battlefield. But because of French restrictions prohibiting such things, his ashes were put to rest among the remains of British soldiers who were killed in action and buried in the Marcoing British Cemetery.

In later days his decorations were sold by his widow for a hefty 27,000 pounds, but it is pleasant to relate that they were later acquired and presented to the Green Howards by a patriot and great friend of the regiment, Sir Ernest Harrison, OBE. Tandey's medals reside today in the regimental museum in the city of Richmond, Yorkshire. He is also commemorated in an unusual way, one which he probably would have liked. There is a Tandey Bar in the Royal Hotel, Royal Leamington Spa, and for years there was a VC Lounge in Leamington's Regent Hotel, where Tandey had worked before his enlistment in 1910.

For many years Tandey's old regiment, the Green Howards, was one of the few units unaffected by the perpetual reorganizations and amalgamations imposed by British governments. And then, in 2004, during still another reorganization, the Green Howards became part of the new Yorkshire Regiment, sharing that distinction not only with The Prince of Wales' Own Regiment of Yorkshire, but also with the Duke of Wellington's Regiment.

The new outfit shares the gallantry of Private Henry Tandey. He will not be forgotten. ●

The Carpenter's Plot

A NONDESCRIPT GERMAN CABINETMAKER ALMOST SUCCEEED IN KILLING ADOLF HITLER IN 1939. ONCE AGAIN HITLER'S FABLED LUCK HELD TRUE.

By Blaine Taylor

At exactly 8 PM on November 8, 1939, German Chancellor Adolf Hitler strode briskly into Munich's Burgerbraukeller beer hall at the head of his glowering entourage, brushing past a forest of hands raised in the Nazi salute. As a band struck up the party anthem, the "Horst Wessel Song" (named after a dead SA storm trooper killed in a brawl with a Communist), Hitler and the other party leaders, including Josef Goebbels, Rudolf Hess, Martin Bormann, and Heinrich Himmler, took their seats at the plain wooden tables where so many Nazis had quaffed good Bavarian brews in years gone by.

The evening marked the 16th anniversary of Hitler's abortive 1923 attempt to take over the German state by force. That would-be coup had ended in bloodshed and disaster, but since Hitler's appointment as chancellor a decade later, the event had taken on a semireligious atmosphere in the Nazi pantheon of solemn holidays, commemorating those killed by police bullets when the future Nazi Führer was still an unknown street agitator. Now he commanded the mightiest nation in Europe.

Because of the just-begun war with Great Britain, France, and their allies, Hitler had not been expected to address the present gathering of Nazi "Old Fighters" and had in fact named Hess to be his stand-in. At the last

German Chancellor Adolf Hitler speaks at an earlier ceremony at the Burgerbraukeller beer hall in Munich. He is standing at the exact spot where the assassin's bomb went off on November 8, 1939.

minute, however, Hitler decided to come himself. At 8:10 PM, he took his place at the usual lectern, with a Nazi swastika flag covering the pillar directly behind him, six feet away. He immediately launched into a furious speech attacking the British, which had his supporters clapping and cheering. As he spoke, however, Hitler's adjutant, Julius Schaub, passed him cue cards reminding him of the time—he had a train to catch. "Ten minutes. Five minutes. Stop!" read the cards.

Abruptly, Hitler ended his speech after 57 minutes, not the usual 90 minutes he devoted to listening to himself rant. He left his followers with the injunction: "Party members, comrades of our National Socialist movement, our German people, and above all our victorious Wehrmacht, Sieg Heil!" and stepped down from the podium. Normally, Hitler would have stayed behind to shake hands, but Schaub managed to hustle him out of the hall at 9:12 PM, closely followed by all the top members of the Nazi government. The group was in a limousine heading for the Munich train station when a muffled explosion was heard in the distance. What did it mean?

At exactly 9:20—a mere eight minutes after Hitler left the hall—waitress Maria Strobel was busy clearing Hitler's table of empty steins and full ashtrays, fretting that the Führer had neglected to pay his bill. Suddenly, the ceiling exploded, and she was flung down the entire length of the hall and out through the doors. The smell of cordite lingered in the air, along with the thick choking dust of collapsed brick. Groans from the dying and wounded could be heard in the confusion. Among those emerging from the rubble covered with chalk dust was the father of Eva Braun, the Führer's mistress. In all, seven people were killed and another 63 injured.

Climbing aboard his train, Hitler was blissfully unaware that he and his top men had narrowly avoided death. At Nuremberg, Goebbels, his face deathly pale, brought Hitler the news in the form of a telegram from Munich. Later, reflecting upon his miraculous luck, Hitler told photographer Heinrich Hoffmann: "I had a most extraordinary feeling, and I don't myself know how or why, but I felt compelled to leave the cellar just as quickly as I could. The fact that I left the Burgerbraukeller earlier than usual is a corroboration of Providence's intention to let me reach my goal." Earlier that day, Hitler recalled, Gerdy Troost, the widow of his favorite architect, had warned him of a possible assassination, and he had been uneasy upon his arrival in Munich.

Immediately after the news, Himmler announced

The aftermath of the explosion reveals a scene of utter destruction. Seven people were killed and another 63 injured.

that the bombing had been "a foreign plot," posted a reward for the culprits, and ordered the German frontiers sealed. In his diary, Goebbels claimed that the bombing had been the work of "Black Front" leader Otto Strasser, exiled in Paris since 1934, the year that Hitler had murdered Strasser's older brother, Gregor, in the famed "Blood Purge" of June 30. Strasser denied any involvement in the attempt. Within the ranks of the secret anti-Hitler German Army resistance movement, there was talk that the number-two Nazi, Luftwaffe Field Marshal Hermann Göring, was behind it all and, indeed, Göring had been mysteriously absent from the annual ceremony. In truth, however, the portly Göring had not taken part in the attempt and had missed the occasion because of legitimate illness.

Who, then, was responsible? Within the resistance, there was consternation, as the monocled Prussian generals had been debating how best to depose Hitler and head off his planned assault on the West ever since the victorious conquest of Poland a few weeks earlier. Indeed, on November 5, Hitler had had a furious argument with General Walther

American GIs outside the main entrance to the Burgerbraukeller in April 1945. The beer hall was later replaced by a hotel.

Hitler speaks at the Burgerbraukeller three months before the nearly successful attempt on his life.

von Brauchitsch at the Chancellery, during which time the general had claimed that there was talk of mutiny in certain German Army units, reminiscent of 1918, and a refusal to fight the British and French. Enraged, Hitler shouted: "What action has been taken by the Army commander? How many death sentences have been carried out?" He stormed out, slamming the door behind him.

Himmler had long suspected that there was a putsch in the offing, an event feared by the Nazis since they had taken office in 1933. He and the head of the Nazi Party secret police, SS General Reinhard Heydrich, had instructed Colonel Walter Schellenberg to open contacts with the British Secret Service in Holland. The trim, dapper Schellenberg passed himself off to the unsuspecting British as a representative of the German underground movement. At 2 AM on November 9, Schellenberg was awakened by a telephone call from Himmler, who told him of the attempt on the Führer's life. Hitler, he said, believed that it was a British plot, and over Schellenberg's strong objections to the contrary Himmler ordered him to abduct the two British agents later that same day.

At 3 PM, a black Buick drove up to Venlo, on the Dutch side of the frontier; inside were British Major S. Payne Stevens and Captain R.H. Best, along with a Dutch officer. Suddenly, a car carrying several pistol-brandishing SS men roared across the border, and a five-minute gunfight ensued in which the Dutch officer was mortally wounded and Schellenberg himself missed by inches being struck by an SS bullet. Stevens and Best were hustled into Germany. Hitler wanted to place them on trial, but the evidence simply wasn't there to incriminate the pair. In a rage, the Führer blamed the lax security measures of the SS at the Burgerbraukeller.

Another viewpoint was expressed by Italian Foreign Minister Count Galeazzo Ciano, Benito Mussolini's son-in-law, in his secret diary entry of November 8, 1939. "The attempt on Hitler's life at Munich leaves everybody quite skeptical, and Mussolini is more skeptical than anyone else," he wrote. "In reality, many of the aspects of the affair do not altogether convince us of the accuracy of the account given in the papers. Either it is a master plot on the part of the police—with the overdone purpose of creating anti-British sentiment in the German people who are quite indifferent—or, if the murder attempt is real, it is a family brawl of people belonging to the inner circle of the Nazi Party; perhaps a carry-over of what took place on the 30th of June [1934] which cannot have been forgotten in Munich."

The real culprit was much more prosaic. Rather than being an aristocratic, high-ranking German officer or a pair of suave British spies, he was an unassuming 36-year-old Swabian cabinetmaker, Johann Georg Elser, whose only previous political activity was to become a member of the local woodworkers' union. Elser was angry at Hitler for failing to cure unemployment and for leading Germany into a war that Elser felt was a lost cause from the start. Noting that Hitler was always surrounded by heavily armed guards and rarely appeared or traveled at set

times, Elser decided to strike at the one moment and place where the Führer almost never failed to appear—the Burgerbraukeller in Munich on November 8.

On that day a year earlier, Elser had stalked Hitler at the same beer hall, watching him and other Nazi leaders stride down the boulevard in their annual commemorative march for the dead of 1923. Ironically, at that same moment another would-be assassin, Swiss waiter and ex-seminarian Maurice Bavaud, was in the same crowd, trying unsuccessfully to use a pistol to shoot Hitler from a distance. Bavaud was caught and later beheaded for his troubles.

Johan Georg Elser, the bomber, died in SS hands.

Elser was more careful and diligent. He worked in a mine quarry and had access to explosives. Beginning in August 1939, Elser smuggled himself into the Burgerbraukeller every night for 35 days, working on the pillar undetected and silently in the dark with a flashlight, installing his time bomb, complete with a hidden compartment and a hinged door. On November 6, 63 hours and 20 minutes before the actual explosion, Elser set the timing device on the mechanism and left. He returned to check it on the 7th at 9 PM, and then headed for the Swiss frontier, where he was arrested at Constance, Germany, on suspicion of smuggling just before the actual Munich detonation. A search of his knapsack revealed pliers, suspicious metal parts, handwritten notes on explosives making, and a postcard of the Burgerbraukeller.

Brought to Berlin, Elser was brutally interrogated, kicked in the ribs several times by Himmler himself. Bloodied, Elser denied all knowledge of a wider plot, although he reportedly admitted that two mysterious men had supplied him with the explosives. He did not know who they were, Elser claimed. That same day, November 9, Hitler decided not to march in the Beer Hall Putsch commemoration as in years past. On the 10th, still fearful of army reaction to his western assault plans, he postponed the jump-off date of November 15 for the first of 29 times. (It finally took place on May 10, 1940.) On November 11, Hitler attended the public funeral in Munich for victims of the blast.

Meanwhile, Elser was sent to Dachau concentration camp, where he later smuggled a note to Best and Stevens claiming that he had been brought before the commandant at Dachau in October 1939 and given the bomb by the two unknown men—SS agents?—who had persuaded him to plant the device to kill "traitors against the Führer." According to Elser's alleged account, the explosion was intentionally delayed until after Hitler left the building.

Was any of this true? Was Schellenberg, in fact, a double agent for the British? He survived the war, escaped being tried as a war criminal at Nuremberg, and died peacefully in 1948 of natural causes. Was the explosion caused by a dissident Nazi anti-Hitler movement angry over the Nazi-Soviet Pact of the previous August? Was the blast calculated by Hitler himself to whip up German enthusiasm for the war, as American radio correspondent William Shirer believed? Or was there actually an SS plot to take over the Third Reich in 1939? We will never know for sure. Heydrich was assassinated in 1942, and Himmler died a suicide in 1945, taking his secrets with him to the grave. He had, however, seen to it that Georg Elser lived an almost privileged existence at Dachau, and even provided him with tools and wood to make cabinets.

Whatever the case, on April 5, 1945, with Allied troops drawing ever closer, Himmler ordered his henchmen at Dachau: "During the next air raid, see to it that Elser is mortally wounded. Destroy this order when the deed has been executed." Four days later, as American bombers flew overhead, the little cabinetmaker was led from his cell at Dachau and shot, the last victim of the audacious bombing that very nearly had saved the world from the horrors of World War II and the Holocaust.

In 2003, the German government honored Georg Elser with a postage stamp bearing his stated reasons for the bombing: "I wanted to prevent the war." It was a fitting if simple epitaph for a still largely unknown hero. ●

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Operation Valkyrie

THE ANTI-HITLER BOMB PLOT OF JULY 20, 1944 ALMOST SUCCEEDED AND HELPED INTENSIFY THE WAR.

By Blaine Taylor

For Nazi Party *Führer* (Leader) and German Reich Chancellor Adolf Hitler, July 20th, 1944 dawned as a routine working day at his principal wartime military headquarters, the Wolfsschanze (Fort Wolf) in the East Prussian forest of Rastenburg, some three hundred air miles from Berlin, in what is today Poland. He was to have his daily military situation conference at 1 PM.

That summer the news delivered to him at those sessions was always bad, as both the Western Allied armies and those of the Soviet Union were pressing in relentlessly on the long-secure borders of the "Thousand Year" Nazi Third Reich created by Hitler in 1933, barely 11 years earlier.

The *Führer*'s Axis Pact partner-in-arms—former *Duce* (Leader) of Fascist Italy Benito Mussolini—was expected for a meeting with Hitler. His pending visit—the last the two dictators would ever have—meant that the German officers' briefing of the Führer would be convened at 12:30 instead of at 1:00, in order to complete business in case of an early arrival of the Duce's train at the nearby Gorlitz railway platform.

Other than this, there was no reason to expect anything out of the ordinary—let alone that Hitler himself would be almost killed that day by a time-bomb explosion engineered by his own officers!

The conference room and table after the assassination attempt. Windows helped the blast spend its force outward. INSET: Colonel Claus Schenck von Stauffenberg carried the bomb into the meeting at Wolf's Lair and was convinced he had killed Hitler.

Taken five days before the bomb plot explosion, this is the only known photograph of the would-be assassin Claus Schenck von Stauffenberg (far left) with Hitler.

The importance of the failed anti-Hitler bomb plot of July 20, 1944 can hardly be overestimated. As former *Wehrmacht* soldier and Towson University history professor Armin Mruck wrote, "Most of the American G.I.s who died in World War II died after July 20, 1944. Most of the material destruction in Europe occurred after July 20, 1944. While the German armies in the East were retreating, they were still capable of rendering the Soviet Army effective resistance. As a matter of fact, German troops were still in control of much of Europe."

Had the plot succeeded and Hitler been either killed or removed, or the Nazis overthrown without his death, history might have been very different. The war possibly would have ended with no enemy troops on German soil, the Russians contained in Eastern Europe alone and many thousands more Jews, political internees and Allied prisoners-of-war liberated from various Nazi camps strewn across the length and breadth of occupied Europe.

But this was not to be, and the failure of the anti-Hitler plot became one of modern history's great tragedies.

Fort Wolf—so-called because of the Führer's predilection for the wolf—was located in a damp, murky, mosquito-ridden pine forest on the eastern edge of the German Reich. Hitler's war was conducted there under the tall, forbidding trees in an aura of both secrecy and seclusion, a sort of hidden Nazi Camp David.

There were three concentric rings of security in the area, with entrances guarded by stationed SS troops armed with submachine guns. Besides quarters for top Nazi Party and *Wehrmacht* (military) officials in the barbed wire-enclosed compound, there was a kitchen, theater, air-raid shelter and tea house, all encased in concrete and above—not below—ground (because of the shallow, watery soil).

This was the situation and the locale at Rastenburg at 10:15 AM on July 20 when an airplane carrying Lt. Col. Claus Schenck von Stauffenberg traveling from Berlin to report to the Führer landed at a military airfield called Rangsdorf nine miles from Fort Wolf.

The handsome von Stauffenberg was the driving force behind a large military and civilian conspiracy against Hitler, which had begun as early as 1938, and included several nearly successful attempts to either arrest or kill the Führer. The plots had always failed, however, either because of Hitler's almost incredible good luck (such as changing his travel plans at the last moment, or the occasion, in 1943, when a bomb placed aboard his Kondor aircraft failed to detonate), or the reluctance of anyone to actually approach him with a pistol and simply shoot him. The latter course meant, naturally, death—either being shot on the spot by SS guards if one was lucky, or slow torture later if not.

Von Stauffenberg was a most unlikely candidate for the melodramatic role of political assassin. The scion of a landed gentry military family, the count, at 37, had lost his right forearm, his left eye and two fingers of his left hand, plus injuries to his left knee and ear in an enemy land-mine explosion in 1942 in North Africa as part of Field Marshal Erwin Rommel's famed Afrika Korps.

Like other conspirators, however, von Stauffenberg had come to believe that only Hitler's murder would set in motion their long-planned putsch against the Nazi regime that they all detested. He, like they, believed that Adolf Hitler was leading Germany to destruction, and they were determined to replace both him and his infamous regime with a more moderate government that could win a reasonable peace from the Western Allies, and so prevent the Red Army of Soviet dictator Josef Stalin from overrunning their country, and much of the rest of Europe as well.

The conspiracy to depose Hitler and his minions included several diverse strains within German society: soldiers, labor leaders, churchmen and intellectuals.

Among the soldiers there were Field Marshals Erwin

von Witzleben and "Clever Hans" von Kluge; Generals Ludwig Beck, Friedrich Olbricht, Hans Oster, Karl Heinrich von Stulpnagel, Friedrich Fromm, Erich Fellgiebel and Helmuth Stieff. All these men believed that Germany had already lost the war militarily.

The conspirators, joined together in a loose alliance against the Nazis that was in constant danger of being discovered by the SS and Gestapo (as, indeed, this writer believes it was), lacked a leader to pull all the threads to one end—the assassination of the Führer. In the handsome von Stauffenberg they had finally found that man, and so it was that he arrived that hot and sultry morning at Rastenburg to meet his destiny.

(It is this author's opinion—after decades of research on this topic and its relevant personalities—that both SS Reichsfuhrer [National Leader] Heinrich Himmler and his rival, Reich Marshal and *Luftwaffe* Commander-in-Chief Hermann Goring knew well in advance that something was in the works. Himmler had at his command the entire security apparatus of the Third Reich, while Goring had his telephone wiretapping Research Office, established by him in 1933 and not given over to Himmler the following year with the Gestapo. I believe both men realized that the war was lost and wanted to be Hitler's successor. They knew about the plot but stood aside, did nothing, and were prepared to let events take their course. Neither was at the conference at which the bomb exploded but arrived later in response to the news about the assassination attempt. Also not present at Fort Wolf at the time were Dr. Josef Goebbels and Albert Speer; they had scheduled a meeting in Berlin.)

In order to destroy Hitler, von Stauffenberg had to fly to East Prussia, enter the conference room and—using a pair of ice tongs to break an acid capsule that would provide a 10-minute fuse—place the time bomb (wrapped in a shirt) in his briefcase as close to Hitler as possible.

Following the explosion (which he somehow must avoid), he would then find a way to leave Fort Wolf, fly back to Berlin, and there lead the revolt in person! In one day von Stauffenberg would thus overthrow one government and start another—or so the plan went until fate intervened.

The Count learned of the conference schedule change upon his arrival in Rastenburg and, in addition (a crucial fact) that the meeting site itself had been moved from a huge concrete bunker—Hitler's own—to the Lagebaracke, or Conference Hut. An explosion in the bunker would, due to the enclosed, encased area, kill everyone immediately, while the wooden, thinly walled Conference Hut, with its entrance and windows, would allow much of the explosion's pressure to escape the building, thus giving the occupants a fair chance of survival. This is, in fact, what occurred.

At 12:30, Hitler stood with 23 generals, officers and aides poring over maps spread out on a heavy oak tabletop, listening to several reports. At 12:32, von Stauffenberg broke the acid capsule of the two-pound bomb and placed the briefcase at the base of the table support a few feet away from the Führer. At 12:35 he left the hut to make an imaginary phone call. At 12:42 PM, the bomb exploded.

To the watching von Stauffenberg outside, it seemed as if a 150-mm howitzer shell had hit the hut directly. Utilizing the ensuing confusion, he bluffed his way past the startled guards, out of Rastenburg and was airborne for Berlin by 1:15 PM, convinced that he had, indeed, killed Adolf Hitler. But Hitler lived.

When the bomb exploded, Hitler had been laying almost prone across the table, following a detailed report on Russian troop movements being given by Gen. Adolf Heusinger. The fact that an officer had moved the briefcase to the other side of the oak table support (thereby putting the support between the bomb and Hitler), plus the open windows and flimsy walls and roof, had saved Hitler's life.

The bomb had gone off with a deafening roar. The windows were blown out, the roof buckled and part of it collapsed. One officer was actually blown out of the building altogether, landed on his feet and ran for help! Smoke and debris mingled in the air with the cries of the wounded and dying.

Inside, Army Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel began calling out, "Wo ist der Führer?" (Where is the Leader?) In his excellent 1964 book, *Nemesis of Power: The German Army in Politics, 1918-45*, British author Sir John W. Wheeler-Bennett gives a detailed account of what happened to Hitler:

"His hair was set on fire, his right arm was temporarily and partially paralyzed, his right leg was badly burned. Both eardrums were damaged and his hearing affected. His trouser legs were blown off at the belt, and a heavy object from the roof had fallen across his back and buttocks, tearing a great piece of cloth from his tunic and bruising him that, as he later announced, he had 'A backside like a baboon.'

"Hitler's first impression was that they had been bombed from the air, then that a bomb had been thrown

LEFT: Colonel Otto Remer, a major at the time of the assassination attempt, commanded the Berlin Greater Germany Guards Regiment and helped thwart the coup d'etat. RIGHT: General Erich Fellgiebel, chief of signals for the high command of the armed forces, was responsible for severing communications between Wolf's Lair and Berlin.

from the outside through the window or that it had been planted under the floor. According to all accounts, he behaved with calmness. Having extricated himself from the debris of the table and put out the flames in his hair and clothing, he allowed himself to be led by Keitel from the shattered hut to his own quarters, his right arm hanging slack at his side, his hair singed and a livid scarlet burn upon the sallow pallor of his face."

It should here be recalled that, as an infantryman in the German Army during WW I on the Western Front, Hitler had experienced a full four years of intensive shelling and other combat conditions, winning the Iron Cross lst and 2nd Class.

Twenty-four people were present in the hut at the time of the explosion. One died on the spot, three others died later of their wounds, two were severely wounded and others slightly, such as Hitler himself and Col. Gen. (U.S. equivalent to a four-star general) Alfred Jodl, who appears in several photographs taken later that day with his head bandaged.

As Hitler emerged from the wrecked hut, one of Nazi Propaganda Minister Dr. Josef Goebbels' aides who was present reportedly heard the Führer mutter, "Oh! My best trousers! I only put them on yesterday!" These trousers—as well as Hitler's torn tunic jacket—were later considered by the Nazis to be holy relics, and the Führer had them sent to his mistress, Eva Braun, for safekeeping. At the war's end, as Hitler's mountain chalet, The Berghof, was overrun by U.S. Army troops, his partially destroyed uniform was discovered. Two years later, it was burned.

Later that same afternoon, right on schedule, the Duce's train from Italy slid up to the Gorlitz railway platform, and Hitler—cleaned and changed, his hair trimmed to hide the burning and a cape thrown over his shoulders (despite the stifling heat) to conceal his condition—greeted Mussolini with the startling news. The Duce—who had been overthrown the previous July in a palace coup in Italy—was stunned, and noticed that the Führer shook hands with his left hand.

The two men walked to the compound's tea house with Heinrich Himmler, Hermann Goring, Reichsleiter, Secretary to the Führer Martin Bormann, Nazi Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop and a coterie of other lesser aides.

At 5 that evening, joined by German Navy Grand Adm. Karl Donitz, the bizarre tea party began. As Mussolini and the embarrassed Italian Fascist entourage looked on in amazement, and while Hitler sat silent and morose, the Nazi leaders began berating one another for their individual failures of war leadership, and Goring even reportedly took a swing at von Ribbentrop with his swagger stick Reich Marshal's baton.

By chance, someone mentioned the 1934 anti-Storm Troop "Blood Purge," almost an exact decade before this day's events, and Hitler jumped up in a furious rage. "I will show them no mercy! I will put their wives and children into concentration camps!" He ordered Himmler to fly to Berlin immediately and put down the now-unmasked military revolt there. "If anyone offers any resistance, shoot him, regardless of who it is! Be pitiless," he shouted at the Reichsfuhrer, who was only too happy and willing to agree, enmeshed as he himself was—as I believe—in the knowledge of this event beforehand.

Following the conclusion of this spectral scene, Hitler and his entourage escorted the departing Duce and his party back to their train for the return trip to German-occupied northern Italy, the Fascist Salo Republic of which the Duce was the nominal head as Hitler's puppet satellite ruler. The two men would never meet in person again; the war's end less than a year later would see the Duce murdered and the Führer dead by suicide.

Meanwhile—in Berlin, Paris and on the Western Front in France—the codeword of the conspiracy, *Valkyrie*, had been given and the long-planned attempt to overthrow the Nazi regime and end the war was well under way in spite of what was then happening at far-off Rastenburg.

In the Reich's capital, Col. Gen. Ludwig Beck and the other dissident army conspirators at the War Ministry

Building arrested Home Army General Fritz Fromm (who was wavering between loyalty to both Hitler and the plotters) and his aides. Von Stauffenberg arrived by air from East Prussia, asserted that the Führer was dead, and the order was given for the arrest of Dr. Joseph Goebbels.

In Paris, the German Military Governor, Gen. Karl von Stulpnagel, ordered the arrest of the local SS and Gestapo officials, which was actually accomplished both speedily and with surprise. Despite all these developments, however, the German Commander-in-Chief of the Western Armies, Field Marshal Hans von Kluge, refused to surrender his troops to the Western Allies without official confirmation of the Führer's demise. The plotters in Berlin were saying that this was, indeed, the case, and his own staff officers were urging him to act even if it was not, but the telephone lines from Rastenburg—amazingly uncut—were stating categorically that Hitler lived.

And so it was that the conspirators' plans to install Field Marshal Erwin Rommel as the new Reich President, Field Marshal Erwin von Witzleben as the new *Wehrmacht* (Armed Forces) Commander, and Dr. Karl Goerdeler as the next Reich Chancellor came to naught because of uninterrupted communications from Fort Wolf to the outside world. Some historians have felt that, had Rommel not been seriously wounded by Allied aircraft fire on the 17th—just three days before the bomb explosion—the plot would have succeeded anyway, but that remains open to conjecture.

What actually happened is known, however, and, as Goebbels later sneered contemptuously, "They didn't even know enough to cut the telephone wires!" This fact, and the Führer's survival, were the two key elements in the plot's overall failure.

Sometime around 7 that evening in Berlin, an army battalion loyal to the plotters was ordered to the Propaganda Ministry to seize Dr. Goebbels, who was then in conference with Albert Speer, Hitler's architect and Nazi Minister of Armaments and War Production. Major Otto Remer commanded the troops, and demanded to see Dr. Goebbels, who in turn insisted that Hitler lived and that Remer, not he, was a traitor if he obeyed the orders of the rebels to arrest him.

Next, Goebbels asked if Remer wanted to talk with the Führer. Stunned, the major agreed, and Dr. Goebbels immediately called Rastenburg. Hitler asked Remer, "Do you recognize my voice?" The major did, and from that moment on the plotters were doomed. Hitler ordered Remer to obey only Goebbels and Himmler, who arrived in Berlin around 8 PM. Joined by SS General Ernst Kaltenbrunner and SS Colonel Otto Skorzeny, the Nazis now launched their own counterattack against the plotters.

Meanwhile, at the War Ministry on the Bendlerstrasse in Berlin, the news of both Hitler's survival and von Kluge's refusal to join the foundering revolt was known, and the conspirators wavered. Fromm and his officers were released and took over the building themselves.

General Beck committed suicide, and, in order to hide his own complicity, General Fromm had von Stauffenberg and other conspirators placed before a wall in the garden and shot by a firing squad that very evening. In Paris, the detained Nazi officials were also released, and the plot collapsed. By 11:30 PM, it was all over.

At 1 AM July 21, a startling announcement was made over the Reich radio that the Führer would speak live. "By now, I do not know how many times an assassination has been planned and attempted against me. If I speak to you today … you should hear my voice and know that I am unhurt and well," he said.

Because of the assassination attempt, Hitler radically altered the structure of the German Armed Forces. He announced in his speech the appointment of Himmler as Commander of the Reserve, thus introducing a military neophyte to the command of important German ground forces.

The next day, Hitler named Germany's most famous panzer expert—tanker Gen. Heinz Guderian—as Chief of the German General Staff, an open acknowledgement that the German Army officer of the old school was a thing of the past. Hitler and the Nazi Party no longer trusted its own army officer corps at all, and officers were now compelled to surrender their sidearms before being shown into the Führer's conference rooms.

And what of the conspirators who survived the 20th? The Nazi People's Court in Berlin tried and convicted most of them for treason against the state. Many were executed. Both Field Marshals von Kluge and Rommel committed suicide, and Gen. Fridrich Fromm was executed by the SS.

Some survived the war, however, such as Major Fabian von Schlabrendorff, who wrote a best-selling, first-person account entitled *The Secret War Against Hitler*.

The Zusammenbruch or "collapse" of the Nazi regime in May 1945 took care of the rest of the characters in the Wagnerian-style drama. Hitler, Goring, Goebbels and Himmler all committed suicide rather than face an Allied

Hitler showing Mussolini the room in which the bomb went off. Four persons were killed or mortally wounded. Hitler was barely hurt.

noose or firing squad, while Kaltenbrunner, Keitel, Jodl and von Ribbentrop all were hanged at Nuremberg on Oct. 16, 1946.

Skorzeny died of natural causes in 1975, as did Speer six years later—in London in the arms of a mistress! The wounded Gen. Adolf Heusinger went on to serve in the reborn German Army, the Bundeswehr, in the 1950s. The body of the last major participant, Martin Bormann, turned up in a grave in Berlin in 1972, after decades of speculation that he had escaped Allied justice and fled abroad. In reality, he was killed by Soviet fire while attempting to flee Berlin after Hitler's death in the underground *Führer* Bunker.

Today, there are several public memorials in reunited Germany to the fallen heroes of the resistance plot of July 20, 1944. They may have failed, but at least they tried to do what they felt was both moral and right, and many lost their lives in the effort. As one of them, Nikolaus von Halem, said upon receiving his death sentence, "A ship may sink, but does not have to strike the flag." ●

British Sniper Attack

THE DETAILS OF OPERATION FOXLEY, A BRITISH ATTEMPT TO ASSASSINATE ADOLF HITLER, WERE A CLOSELY GUARDED SECRET FOR DECADES.

By Peter Kross

The sniper was perched under a craggy bluff overlooking German Führer Adolf Hitler's alpine mountain retreat at Berchtesgaden in Bavaria. He made a slight adjustment to his highly crafted gun, aligned the sights, checked the wind conditions, and waited for his target to appear. The sniper had been well trained for this most dangerous of all assignments, one he had been anticipating for a long time. In what seemed like hours, but in reality was only a short time, the man he was sent to kill came into view. The sniper recognized his target immediately. He was short in stature, had dark hair, and wore the famous mustache that he had come to know so well. As Adolf Hitler emerged from his home into the crisp, mountain air, the assassin locked him in his sights, took a deep breath, and pulled the trigger.

This scenario did not take place. However, as World War II dragged on with no apparent end in sight, Allied leaders in Britain were seriously contemplating the assassination of Adolf Hitler to end the war in Europe. It has come to light in recent years via a 120-page dossier gleaned from the British Public Records Office in Kew, that a serious attempt to kill Hitler was being contemplated at the highest levels of British intelligence. The code name for this pro-

Great Britain's two intelligence services, the SOE and the SIS, devised various plots to kill Adolf Hitler. In the end, Great Britain was reluctant to make Hitler a martyr by assassinating him. BELOW: Hitler and Eva Braun at Berchtesgaden.

posed assassination effort was Operation Foxley. Operation Foxley was the product of Britain's two intelligence services, the Special Operations Executive (SOE) and the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS). Another part of this most secret operation was dubbed Little Foxleys, which involved plans to kill certain top leaders of the Nazi regime.

Brig. Gen. Colin Gubbins.

The details of Operation Foxley were once one of the most guarded secrets still to be hidden from the public concerning World War II. Now, with a new policy of open government in Britain, historians and those interested in the secret side of the global conflict which ended almost 70 years ago have a new story to contemplate.

By 1944, the British intelligence services had a complete dossier on Adolf Hitler's habits and living conditions. It was up to the SOE to pull all the various data on him into one coherent file and disseminate this information to all relevant parties. As the intelligence officers began plotting the best way to eliminate the Führer, a number of wild schemes came into focus. These included poisoning his food or drink, impregnating his clothes with a deadly toxin, destroying his train en route to his mountain hideaway in the Alps, and sending in a sniper to kill him as he made his way around his summit at the Berghof. The CIA used many of these same schemes in an effort to try to kill Cuban dictator Fidel Castro in 1960 and 1961.

According to documents in the newly released Foxley files, the characteristics of the ingredients to be used to poison Hitler were dubbed "1." The documents in the Foxley file state: "(1) It is tasteless and odorless, (2) Neither hard nor soft water is visibly affected by the addition of one lethal dose (2 grams, to 2½ pints), (3) Black coffee treated with "1" in the same ratio indicates no perceptible change in appearance. Nor would the addition of milk make any immediate difference in the appearance of the beverage. (4) Tea with milk treated as above shows no detectable change, but without milk it immediately becomes opalescent and in the course of an hour or so becomes quite turbid and deposits a brown sediment. Hitler, according to reliable information, is a tea addict. He always drinks it with milk. Since the milk is poured into his cup, it is unlikely that the tea's opalescence would be noticed as it came from the teapot."

The documents in the Foxley file state in sharp terms the objective to be carried out. "(1) Object: The elimination of Hitler and any high-ranking Nazis or members of the Führer's entourage who may be present at the attempt, (2) means: sniper's rifle or bazooka and splinter grenades; derailment and destruction of the Führer's train by explosives; clandestine means, (3) scene of operations: the most recent information available on Hitler and his movements narrows down the field of endeavor to two locations of action, vis, the Berchtesgaden area and Hitler's train."

By the time the Foxley teams were planning Hitler's demise, the war had been going on for four harrowing years. Millions of innocent victims had died in Nazi concentration camps, as well as hundreds of thousands of combatants from the warring nations. Yet, the leaders of the nations at war were not targets of opportunity.

That is not to say that attempts were not regularly made to assassinate military and political leaders on both sides. On the morning of April 18, 1943, a squadron of U.S. airplanes stationed at Henderson Field on Guadalcanal, scrambled into the air to carry out Operation Vengeance on an intercept mission. Their target was Japanese Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto. Using intelligence gleaned from decrypted orders, the planes ambushed Yamamoto's aircraft, causing the death of Japan's most revered military planner.

On June 24, 1942, a group of Czech partisans ambushed and killed German General Reinhard "The Hangman" Heydrich. Heydrich was appointed commander of the Gestapo in 1936, and was responsible for the murder of thousands of Jews during the war. In retaliation for his murder, the Germans destroyed the Czech town of Lidice, killing all the men and boys and sending the women to concentration camps.

The branch of British Intelligence given the task of running Operation Foxley was the SOE, whose wartime orders given by Winston Churchill were to "set Europe ablaze." The SOE was established by order of Prime Minister Winston Churchill on July 16, 1940, as a covert paramilitary force which would take the war directly into enemy territory.

The SOE's headquarters was located at 64 Baker Street in London. Candidates for possible entry into the SOE were culled from recommendations from the SIS. After each applicant was accepted and passed a rigorous background and security check, he or she was sent for a four-week course of intensive training at a secret location in

England, where they were given training in parachute jumps, small arms, hand-to-hand combat, commando tactics, and radio operations.

From August 1940 to September 1943, two men headed the SOE, Sir Frank Nelson and Sir Charles Hambro. In September 1943, Brig. Gen. Colin Gubbins was picked to be the new chief of the SOE. He was born in Japan in 1896 but had roots in Scotland. Gubbins served in the Royal Artillery in World War I. He did duty in Russia, Ireland, and India. In 1919, he fought on the White Russian side against the Bolsheviks during the Russian Revolution. By 1919, he had been appointed chief of staff of the British military mission in Poland. The next year, Gubbins was tasked with the job of training a new commando unit that would see extensive action in World War II.

When he became chief of the SOE, Gubbins actively oversaw all aspects of operations, overseeing training and initiating relations with the fledgling U.S. spy agency, the Office of Strategic Services (OSS).

SOE agents worked in all parts of Europe. They helped downed Allied airmen escape to England or France and served as liaisons with dissident factions in the region. SOE operations in Germany concerned some of the most highly guarded as well as the most dangerous missions of the war including Operation Foxley.

The other branch of British Intelligence that played a crucial role in Operation Foxley was the SIS. It was the job of SIS planners to supply operational intelligence, that is, to provide the whereabouts of Hitler at any given time. The job of the SIS in World War II, as it is today, was to collect all aspects of intelligence on any matter that is vital to Britain's security. In World War II, the British, using Ultra intercepts, were able to monitor Germany's order of battle as it was being put into operation.

As the planning for Operation Foxley unfolded, the SIS supplied one of its men to aid the SOE in planning the attack on Hitler. One of the jobs of the SIS was to place undercover agents inside Germany. There is no hard evidence that any SIS agent got close enough to Hitler to supply London with any detailed information on the Führer's exact location. The lack of intelligence on Hitler's whereabouts hindered any success that might have pointed the Foxley planners in the right direction.

While the declassified Foxley study presents an overview of the plan to kill Hitler, not all the details are forthcoming. The most important of these are the names of the players on the British side who had a hand in planning the operation. Some of the names are well known to historians of the war, while others are still classified.

One of the leaders of the mission was code named LB/X. The Foxley report gives the name of a staff officer named Major H.B. Court, a man assigned to the SOE at that time, as this agent. After the war, all the military records on LB/X were purged, and it is impossible to actually verify his identity.

While the "foot soldiers" in Operation Foxley were mostly unfamiliar to the general public, their superiors were well known in the intelligence and military establishment. One of the leaders in the planning of the operation was General Sir Hastings Ismay, secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defense. Ismay was a confidant of Prime Minister Winston Churchill and had the dubious responsibility of revealing to the prime minister the fact that Germany had successfully invaded Norway on April 9, 1940.

In the wake of the Norwegian disaster, it was Ismay who wrote a scathing memo to the pertinent officers throughout British Intelligence asking for a more streamlined way in which pending intelligence matters were disseminated to the interested parties. Ismay kept the prime minister fully informed on all aspects of Foxley, and it was through Ismay that Churchill gave his go ahead for the mission to proceed.

Another important member of the Foxley team was the fabled man known in intelligence circles as "C," Brig. Gen. Sir Stewart Menzies. Menzies served in the Life Guards from 1910 until 1939. In 1923, he was appointed as the deputy to Sir Hugh Sinclair, the head of MI-6 until the latter's death in 1939. That year, he was appointed as "C," the head of the super-secret organization. Menzies worked closely with Churchill, who had an avid interest in anything relating to secret work.

Menzies had a solid working relationship with the OSS. He hosted OSS chief Colonel William Donovan when he came to England and the two sides made a secret agreement to share intelligence.

Working alongside Menzies was Gubbins, who actively took over all aspects of the SOE, overseeing training and beginning a secret relationship with the OSS. At the time of the Foxley mission, he had been promoted as the executive head of the SOE and was privy to all its intimate secrets.

The members of the SOE council who had operational control over the mission were a varied group indeed. Among them were Vice Air Marshall Alan Patrick Ritchie, code named AD/A. Ritchie was a veteran of the Royal

Hitler and Eva Braun dining at a tea house in 1942. One assassination scheme involved poisoning Hitler's tea.

Flying Corps and a former RAF pilot. He served briefly as the intelligence head of the RAF, and then became the air officer of the 93rd Group, Bomber Command.

Major General Gerald Templer, code name AD/X, was given the nickname "The Tiger of Malaya," and was wounded in Italy. He was posted to the War Office's Military Intelligence Division and was in charge of the German Directorate Section beginning in November 1944.

Air Commander Archibald Boyle, also known as A/CD , was a veteran of World War I, held a 20-year career in British Intelligence, and served as the SOE's special representative with SIS.

Lieutenant Colonel Ronald Thornely was named AD/X and X1. He was fluent in German and served as Gerald Templer's deputy.

While the British were working on their own plot to kill Adolf Hitler, elements of the German military and political establishment were preparing a plot to end the Führer's life.

From 1921 to the fall of Berlin in 1945, numerous attempts to kill Hitler by his enemies were either talked about or acted upon. New information has come to light that tells of numerous plots by high-ranking German military men or diplomats inside Germany to topple Hitler in the months leading up to the German invasion of Poland in 1939.

Some of these assassination plans include the following attempts. On March 4, 1933, German police arrested a man named Karl Luttner, who had planned to set off a bomb at a rally in Königsberg, where Hitler was scheduled to appear. On November 26, 1937, Josef Thomas, a man suffering from a mental condition, was arrested by the Gestapo in Berlin, where he planned to shoot Hitler and Luftwaffe chief Herman Göring. The noted English agent Alexander Foote, who was employed by Russia during World War II, looked into the possibilities of assassinating Hitler at the Osteria Bavaria restaurant. The years 1938-1939, saw the British military attaché in Berlin, Colonel Noel Mason-MacFarlane, planning as assassination attempt on Hitler, which was discussed by the top military leaders in London. The idea was rejected.

In March 1943, a number of high ranking German military officers. including Brig. Gen. Henning von Tresckov, Lieutenant Fabian von Schlabrendorff, and others, successfully placed a bomb on Hitler's aircraft, a Focke-Wulf 200 Condor. Unfortunately for the planners, the bomb failed to go off.

On July 20, 1944, a highly detailed plot to kill Hitler was carried out by a number of the Führer's enemies, led by Colonel Claus Shenk Graf von Stauffenberg. Stauffenberg placed a bomb inside a room where Hitler and a number of his top associates were meeting. The bomb went off, but it only wounded Hitler. In the wake of the assassination attempt, a purge of those men who took part

in the plot was carried out and many of the insiders were either executed or took their own lives.

The debate among the top members of SOE over how to kill Hitler and whether to proceed with Operation Foxley was heated, to say the least. Some intelligence officers wanted to go ahead, while others saw the futility in the plan and made their thoughts unambiguous. One unnamed individual, according to the declassified report, said that he was "not exactly optimistic or enthusiastic" about killing Hitler.

SOE was in agreement that the project should be carried out, while other military and government leaders preferred an all-out aerial bombardment against German civilian and military targets to bring the regime to its knees. There was also talk among the men that if Hitler were indeed killed he would become a martyr to many Germans, and his death would then be counterproductive in the long run. Some of the leading politicians in Whitehall believed that a living Hitler was better for the Allied cause than a dead one.

A letter from Ronald Thornley said that a living Hitler would be the same as "almost an unlimited number of first class SOE agents strategically placed inside Germany."

One SOE officer who participated in the Foxley planning added, "As a strategist, Hitler has been the greatest possible assistance to the British war effort."

By 1944, the war against Germany was in its final stages. After the successful Allied landings in Normandy, thousands of troops were slogging their way across France and would be on German soil in a matter of months. Even the most ardent German military leaders could see the writing on the wall, and some of them decided to go behind Hitler's back and contact the Allies to begin peace negotiations.

While the decision to go ahead with Operation Foxley was never implemented, the "what ifs" are enormous as far as historians are concerned.

With the Allies nearing Berlin by early 1945, and Hitler dead, would the German high command, whoever was in charge at the time, have put out peace feelers to end the war? One question that has to be asked is how the German leadership would account for the millions of victims in the concentration camps and the "final solution" to the Jews of Europe. Would they have closed the gas chambers before the Allies found them, covering up their enormous crimes?

If Operation Foxley had been carried out successfully, would the German high command have gone ahead with certain military engagements that had already been planned? For example, would they have started the bloody fighting in the Ardennes Forest in December 1944, which saw massive causalities on both sides?

Another significant concern on the Allied side was their call for the unconditional surrender of Germany in order for the war to come to an end. Would Hitler's successors have agreed to an unconditional surrender, or would they have negotiated for a better deal? More to the point, would the victorious Allies, tired of war and all the suffering that came with it, have gone along? If the British and the Americans agreed to less than unconditional surrender, would Josef Stalin have concurred?

If Hitler was dead, would an Allied Germany now form an alliance with the United States and Great Britain against the Soviet Union? If that had happened, would the Cold War have begun earlier or even degenerated into a "hot" war in Europe with troops from the United States, United Kingdom, and Russia fighting each other among the rubble?

In the end, Adolf Hitler himself made Operation Foxley irrelevant when he committed suicide in his Berlin bunker in April 1945. ●

The RAF Plot

AN RAF ATTEMPT TO ASSASSINATE HITLER IN 1945 FAILED, BUT THE FÜHRER SOON MADE THE EFFORT MOOT BY COMMITTING SUICIDE.

By Charles Whiting

Adolf Hitler believed in *Vorsehung* (providence). The German leader felt that if anything was going to happen to him, such as assassination, there was nothing he could do about it. He had been selected by fate to achieve something great; he would not die, either by accident or assassination, until he had fulfilled that God-given mission.Time and time again in the past, providence, not planning, had taken care of him. In 1933, for instance, just before he became master of the Third Reich, he was involved in a terrible car crash with a truck. He emerged from the wreckage stating that he could not die yet—his mission had not yet been achieved.

It was the same with assassination attempts. Hitler explained that he had many enemies and expected disgruntled Germans and others to try to kill him. But they would never succeed, especially if they came from the German working class. He used to state to his staff quite categorically, *"Mil tut kein deutscher Arbeiter was"* ("No German worker will ever do anything to me."). Once, when he was advised by worried police to use the back entrance to a noisy and angry meeting of workers, Hitler snorted, "I am not going through any back door to meet my workers!"

As for those aristocratic *Monokelfritzen* (Monocle Fritzes, those high-born, monocled aristocrats Hitler had

U.S. soldiers walk past the bombed-out barracks that once housed members of Adolf Hitler's SS guard. The building was hit during an Allied bombing raid.

hated with a passion ever since the Great War), both civilian and military, whom he knew from his intelligence sources had been trying to eradicate him in these last years of the 1930s, he was confident that this personal providence would save him. And in truth, until the very end, providence did protect Hitler from all the attempts on his life, including the generals' plot to kill him in July 1944.

Naturally, ever since Hitler's election as chancellor in 1933, his security guards had taken secret precautions to protect him. Like some medieval potentate, all the Führer's food was checked daily before it was served to him. Each day, his personal doctor had to report that the Führer's food supplies were free of poison. Party Secretary Martin Bormann ran daily checks on the water at any place where the Führer might stay to ascertain whether it might contain any toxic substances.

Later, when Bormann, in his usual fawning manner, started to grow "bio-vegetables" in his Berchtesgaden gardens for the Führer's consumption, Hitler's staff would not allow the produce to appear on the master's vegetarian menu. Once, just before the war, a bouquet of roses was thrown into the Führer's open Mercedes. One of his SS adjutants picked it up and a day later started to show the symptoms of poisoning. The roses were examined and found to be impregnated with a poison that could be absorbed through the skin. Thereafter, the order was given out secretly that no "admirer" should be allowed to throw flowers into Hitler's car. In addition, from then on, adjutants would wear gloves.

On another occasion, Hitler, who loved dogs (some said more than human beings), was given a puppy by a supposed admirer. It turned out that the cuddly little dog had been deliberately infected with rabies. Fortunately for Hitler, and not so fortunately for the rest of humanity, the puppy bit a servant before it bit him. It seemed that Hitler's vaunted providence had taken care of him yet again.

Thereafter, plan after plan was drawn up to kill Hitler by his German and Anglo-American enemies. All failed. Although back in 1939, the British Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, had stated, "We have not reached the stage in our diplomacy when we have to use assassination as a substitute for diplomacy." Prime Minister Winston Churchill decided in April 1945, however, that Hitler must die—by assassination! He gave the task to his most ruthless and anti-German commander, Sir Arthur "Bomber" Harris, the head of Royal Air Force Bomber Command, whose aircrews often called him bitterly "Butcher" Harris.

Back in the summer of 1943, Harris had sworn that Berlin would be "hammered until the heart of Nazi Germany would cease to exist." Hard man that he was, Harris had once been stopped by a young policeman and told if he continued to speed in his big American car, he would kill someone. Coldly, "Bomber" had replied, "Young man, I kill hundreds every night." He now ordered that Hitler should be dealt with at last in his own home. The Führer had escaped, so Allied intelligence reasoned, from his ruined capital Berlin. So where could he be? The answer was obvious. "Wolf," the alias Hitler had used before he achieved power in 1933, had returned to his mountain lair.

In that last week of April 1945, Allied intelligence felt there were only two possible places where Hitler might now be holed up since his East Prussian headquarters had been overrun by the Red Army. Either he was in Berlin, or at his Eagle's Nest in the Bavarian Alps above the township of Berchtesgaden. Reports coming from Switzerland and relayed to Washington and London by Allen Dulles of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) stated that the Germans were building up a kind of last-ditch mountain fortress in the Austrian-German Alps, so Allied intelligence was inclined to think that Hitler had already headed for Berchtesgaden where he could lead the Nazis' fight to the finish. The bulk of the Reichsbank's gold bullion had already been sent to the area to disappear in perhaps the biggest robbery in history.

Luftwaffe chief Hermann Göring had gone in the same direction, followed by Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop, who had taken up residence in his stolen Austrian castle. More importantly, SS General Sepp Dietrich's beaten 6th SS Panzer Army was retreating from Hungary, followed by the Red Army, heading for Austria and the same general area. Thus, the Allied planners decided that if they were finally going to assassinate Hitler, they would find him in his mountain home—built for him over the last decade by Bormann. Prominent Nazis, the *Prominenz,* just like Mafia chieftains, had erected their own homes in Berchtesgaden to be close to Hitler.

Once it had simply been a rural beauty spot, with a couple of modest hotels surrounded by small hill farms that had been in the same hands for centuries. Bormann changed all that. He bribed, threatened, and blackmailed the *Erbbaueren* (the hereditary farmers, as they were called) to abandon their farms. He sold their land at premium rates to fellow Nazis and then, as war loomed, erected a military complex to protect the Führer whenever

LEFT: Hitler's Eagle's Nest offered panoramic views of the Alpine countryside. RIGHT: he remains of the Berghof, the house used by guests at Hitler's residence in the Bavarian Alps, stand as mute testimony to the ferocity of Allied bombing.

he was in residence on the mountain among the "Mountain People," as the Nazis called themselves. After he completed his 50th birthday present for the Führer, the Eagle's Nest, which Hitler visited only five times and which cost 30 million marks to construct, Bormann turned his attention to making the whole mountain complex as secure as possible, both from the land and the air.

Bormann, the "Brown Eminence" as he was known, the secretive party secretary, who in reality wielded more power on the German home front than Hitler himself, declared the whole mountain *sperrgebiet* (off limits). A battalion of the Waffen SS was stationed there permanently. Together with mountain troops from nearby Bad Reichenhall, the SS patrolled the boundaries of this prohibited area 24 hours a day, something the British planners of Operation Foxley, a land attack planned by the British in February 1945, had not reckoned with.

Then, Bormann turned his attention to the threat of an air attack. Great air raid shelters were dug, not only for the Führer and the *Prominenz,* but also for the guards, servants, and foreign workers—there was even a cinema, which could hold 8,000 people. Chemical companies were brought in and stationed at strategic points on the mountain. As soon as the first warning of an enemy air attack was given, they could produce a smoke screen, which, in theory, could cover the key parts of the area in a matter of minutes. Finally, there were the fighter bases such as Furstenfeldbruck in the Munich area where planes could be scrambled to ward off any aerial attack from the west or indeed over the Alps from the newer Allied air bases in Italy.

Whether it was because of Bormann's precautions, the problem of flying over the Alps in a heavy, bomb-laden aircraft, or Allied scruples about bombing an enemy politician's home, the mountain had not been seriously troubled by air raids until now. Bomber Harris was determined to end all that. If anyone could, Harris swore, he would blast Berchtesgaden off the map.

To do so, he picked one of his most experienced bomber commanders: 24-year-old Wing Commander Basil Templeman-Rooke, who had begun his bomber career in 1943. By the end of that year, he had already been awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) and more importantly had flown over the Alps to bomb Turin in the hope that a bombing raid on that city, so far away from England, would encourage the Italians to surrender. After one tour of duty, Templeman-Rooke commenced another one in May 1944. He took part in the D-Day preinvasion bombing of French railways, storage depots, and other targets, and then in the attacks on V-1 buzz bomb sites after the invasion.

The controversial bombing of Dresden followed in February 1945. Shortly thereafter, Templemann-Rooke had been given the command of the Royal Air Force's 170 Squadron and awarded a Bar to his DFC. In March, he received the Distinguished Service Order. For Harris, the young squadron commander must have seemed the ideal leader for what he had in mind for 170 Squadron. He was young, brave, very experienced and, above all, lucky. In his two years of combat, he had survived over 40 missions, and even when he had been hit by flak over

Gelsenkirchen, he had brought his Avro Lancaster bomber back on two engines and crash-landed the four-engine plane without injury. Now, Harris ordered Templeman-Rooke to fly his squadron's last combat mission of the war, its target perhaps the most important one left in Germany during April 1945.

For days now, although the hilltops were still covered with snow down to 900 meters and causing fog, reconnaissance planes kept flying over the mountain, setting off the wail of the sirens and sending the populace scurrying for the shelters. Then, once again the smoke screen would descend on the deserted homes of the Prominenz. For even Hitler's most devoted followers had reasoned that the mountain was no place to be at this stage of the war. Still, there had as yet been no attempt to bomb the area.

That changed at 0930 on Wednesday, April 25, 1945. On the half hour precisely, the pre-alarm sirens started to sound. Obediently, the locals began to file into their air raid shelters, believing that, as usual, nothing much would happen. This time they were wrong. Most of the mountain, right up to the Eagle's Nest at 9,300 feet, was obscured by fog. This time, on Harris's order, 170 Squadron, part of a force of 318 Lancasters, was determined to carry out its mission. Within half an hour of the pre-alarm being sounded, the first bombs were raining down on the twin heights of Klaus-and-Buchenhoehe.

Then came the second raid. According to German reports, the Lancasters swept in shortly afterward, dropping 500-pound bombs. Immediately, they hit Hitler's Berghof, where back in what now seemed another age, the Führer had once received British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, the "Umbrella Man," as the Germans had mocked him due to his appearance. Afterward, as German eyewitnesses recorded, the interior looked like a landscape after an earthquake. Göring's house, demolished together with his swimming pool, followed. Bormann's house received a direct hit. The only place that was not destroyed or damaged was the Eagle's Nest. It had been well camouflaged with tin leaves and was perhaps too small a target for Harris's men. But as the bombers swept on to attack nearby Bad Reichenhall, where 200 people were killed that day, they left behind them only smoking wreckage, which would be added to when the SS guards retreated, setting fire to everything they could not loot.

Hit hard by Allied bombs, the home built for Reichsmarshal Hermann Göring in the Berchtesgaden complex lies in ruins.

But the RAF's raid on the mountain had been in vain. Templeman-Rooke had been misinformed—the Führer was not in residence. He had remained in his bunker, spared yet again by the "providence" in which he believed so strongly. But he knew he could not go on forever. As he declared to anyone still prepared to listen to him in his Berlin bunker, he was not going to die at "the hands of the mob" like his friend and fellow dictator Mussolini. Nor was he going to allow himself to be "paraded through the streets of Moscow" in a cage. So, a broken man, embittered at the failings of his own people, and perhaps a little mad, the leader who had survived so many assassination attempts died by his own hand. His "providence" had run out at last.

Even today, at a certain angle, one can see the series of depressions leading up to where Göring's house was, marking one bomber's run into the attack. Of the house itself only a few steps remain next to some bushes where visitors allow their dogs to do their business—"*Hundepissecke*" the locals call it. One wonders what roly-poly Göring would have said. Probably, he would have reached for his shotgun and started blazing away; he was always very keen to shoot anything on four legs. ●

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