

Chapter 30

April 1984

Finally persuaded to write of my experiences during and after World War II, I decide to look at the materials I have saved from that time. With amazement I examine the correspondence, memoranda, letters home, clippings, brochures, maps, photographs, issues of *Stars and Stripes*, *Yank* magazine, *Army Talks*, tapes of interviews, and the record of the Dachau trial. Letters to and from the National Archives in Washington, D.C., produce additional information.

Wishing to learn more from Hitler's recorders, I write all five at their last known addresses. Only one letter arrives in return—from Elizabeth Jonuschat, still in Berlin. She says three of the five, including her husband, Hans, are dead. Thoet is in a nursing home, unable to speak. The only one left is Ewald Reynitz, somewhere in Munich.

I ask Elizabeth Jonuschat to get me the address of Reynitz, and she does. Later she sends me letters from her dead husband, including

photos of Hitler and his home, the Berghof at Berchtesgaden. In April I reach Reynitz on the telephone in Munich. Does he remember me?

“How could I forget you? You helped me so much.”

I make arrangements to see him in Munich in May.

May 1984

My wife, Ruth, and I have lunch with Reynitz the day after our arrival in Munich. Reynitz, 82, seems in good health and is happy to see us at our hotel. He orders a special kind of beer and, raising it, says with humor, “Here’s to my friend who hasn’t changed much in nearly 40 years, except for some baldness.”

We drive him to his home a few blocks away, see him to his apartment, and agree to see him at midmorning the next day.

“I hope you don’t forget,” he says with a smile.

The next day Reynitz tells me that when his wife died two years ago, he moved from Berlin to Munich to be near his “middle” daughter. (He has three.)

After more small talk, I begin to ask him about Hitler, planning to continue for as many sessions as we have time for. On the second day of what turns out to be a two-week interview, however, Reynitz gives me a scare.

“What are the signs of a heart attack?” he says. “Yesterday, after you left, I was sweating a lot and had dizzy spells for a while. You must keep in mind that I haven’t spoken or thought in English since I left Dachau early in 1946.”

“How do you feel this morning?” I am beginning to think my trip to Munich might be in vain.

“So far, I feel okay,” says Reynitz.

I decide to question Reynitz slowly about Hitler and do what I can to make our sessions easy. I record only his answers:

“The balance between reality and Hitler’s intuition was tilted heavily in favor of his intuition. He had a zealot’s faith in his own mysticism.

“When he spoke of his *intuition*, he often mentioned *politics* [what the German people would think], *foreign policy* [how other countries would react], and *morale* in the armed forces.

“For every decision, there never was a gray area, only black or white alternatives. I cannot emphasize this too much. Hitler was never in doubt about anything, even without having the facts. He said he was a man of destiny. He was certain he could *do* no wrong, much less *think* any wrong. Many of his military orders were those of a stubborn and irrational man. Two examples stand out: the fiasco at Stalingrad and the failure of the Ardennes Offensive. In both, he overruled his field marshals.

“Hitler never permitted much discussion of defeat. He thought that would be a sign of negative thinking and weakness. Instead, he would order a new attack, thinking that would show positive thinking and strong leadership.

“Hitler and his top followers kept repeating that Germany would have won World War I if not stabbed in the back by the ‘November Criminals,’ as he described ‘the politicians prodded by Jews.’ A politician on behalf of Germany signed the November 11, 1918, armistice ending the war.

“Hitler’s constant propaganda urged that Germany avenge itself for the terrible consequences of that armistice—especially the heavy money reparations laid on Germany and its loss of many territories.

“In Hitler’s view, his military moves were a continuation of World War I. His book, *Mein Kampf*, makes this abundantly clear.

“I think if Hitler had stopped at the end of 1938, he might have become a German hero. But, starting in September 1939, he began outright conquest without any pretense of legal basis. His only excuse for the conquests was his own policy of Lebensraum. His real target for Lebensraum was eastern Europe and Russia. To reach those goals, he decided to protect his rear by invading western Europe. Slavs and Marxists were his ultimate goals.

“There was no need for Lebensraum. Germany was exporting grain and factory goods and importing some items like metals and oil. It had land not being cultivated. Germans had no desire to live and work in another country. Each country has its own heritage, traditions, and culture which its people would like to keep alive. Even in Germany, those in the north would not like to be moved south to Bavaria or vice versa. Germans didn’t take Hitler’s theme of Lebensraum seriously. It was too far away. Only his promise of full employment was important.

“People in different countries with varying cultures do not want to be united under one government, so conquest is really useless. There are many examples of this in the world today.”

During our last session for the trip, I show Reynitz a copy of a statement by SS Col. Erich Kempka.

He says, “I remember that well. I told the American intelligence agent, George R. Allen, at Berchtesgaden, that we records knew Kempka well enough to know he was not a clever man and couldn’t possibly invent a story like that. I know he was telling the truth.

“Bormann was never seen again, and I’m sure I would have heard of it if he had been. I’m sure he was killed when the tank he was using for protection flew apart during an antitank strike from the Russians, as Kempka said.”

Then we read together the pertinent parts of Kempka’s statement:

In the days after 20.4.45 [April 20, 1945] I have still seen Hitler several times in his bunker in the Reichs Chancellery. He had not changed in his behavior and gave a quiet impression. Eva Braun stayed with the Fuehrer. After 28.4.1945 there were rumors in the Reichs Chancellery that the Fuehrer had been married during the night from 28 to 29.4.1945 to Eva Braun . . . Only on 1 May 1945 [state secretary in the German Ministry of Propaganda] Dr. Naumann confirmed the fact of the marriage of the Fuehrer . . . I spoke to the Fuehrer for the last time on 29 April 1945 . . .

On 30 April 1945 at 1430 hours [2:30 PM] SS Sturmbannfuehrer Guensche telephoned me and asked me to come to the Fuehrer-bunker. Besides that I was to take care that five cans of gasoline, that is to say 200 [liters], were brought along. I at once took along two or three men carrying the cans. More men were following because it took some time to collect 200 liters of gasoline. By order of SS Sturmbannfuehrer Guensche the cans were brought by these men to the entrance of the Fuehrer-bunker located in the garden of the Reichs Chancellery, which was next to the so-called tower-home and about 20 meters beside the so-called Haus Kempka, my quarters . . . The men at once returned

after putting down the cans. There was a sentry of the SD at the entrance of the bunker.

I then went into the antechamber of the briefing-room where I met Sturmbannfuehrer Guensche. Guensche told me that the Fuehrer was dead. He did not tell me any details about the death of the Fuehrer. He only explained he had got the order from the Fuehrer to burn him at once after his death so that he would not be exhibited at a Russian freak-show.

A short time after that SS Sturmbannfuehrer Linge [valet of the Fuehrer] and an orderly who I do not remember came from the private room of the Fuehrer carrying a corpse wrapped in an ordinary field-gray blanket. Based on the previous information from SS Obersturmbannfuehrer Guensche, I at once supposed that it was the corpse of the Fuehrer. One could only see the long black trousers and the black shoes which the Fuehrer usually wore with his field-gray uniform jacket. Under these circumstances there was no doubt that it was the corpse of the Fuehrer. I could not observe any spots of blood on the body wrapped in the blanket.

Thereupon came Reichsleiter Martin Bormann from the living room of the Fuehrer and carried in his arms the corpse of Mrs. Eva Hitler, nee Braun. He turned the corpse over to me. Mrs. Hitler wore a dark dress. I did not have the feeling that the corpse was still warm. I could not recognize any injuries on the body. The dress was slightly damp only in the region of the heart.

Behind Reichsleiter Bormann there came also Reichsminister Goebbels. SS Sturmbannfuehrer Linge and the orderly

now went upstairs with the corpse of the Fuehrer to the bunker exit towards the garden of the Reichs Chancellery. I followed with the corpse of Mrs. Hitler. Behind me came Reichsleiter Bormann, Dr. Goebbels, and SS Sturmbannfuehrer Guensche.

Reichsleiter Martin Bormann wore uniform. According to my recollection Dr. Goebbels also wore uniform. It was shortly before 1500 hours [3:00 P.M.), if I remember, that I received the first notice from Guensche at 1430 hours [2:30 P.M.] and needed five to 10 minutes to reach the Fuehrerbunker. SS Sturmbannfuehrer Linge and the orderly carried the corpse of the Fuehrer from the westwardly directed bunker exit in the tower-house and put the wrapped corpse on the flat ground in a small depression which was about four to five meters distant from the bunker exit.

There was no lawn, rather bare sand; in the last period construction work was being done in the Reichs Chancellery. I put the corpse of Mrs. Hitler next to the Fuehrer's. Immediately . . . Guensche poured the complete contents of the five cans over the two corpses and ignited the fuel.

Reichsleiter Martin Bormann, Reichsminister Dr. Goebbels, SS Sturmbannfuehrer Guensche, SS Sturmbannfuehrer Linge, the orderly, and I stood in the bunker entrance, looked towards the fire, and all saluted with raised hands. The stay in the bunker exit lasted only a short time because the garden of the Reichs Chancellery was under heavy artillery fire. The short-lasting leaving [*sic*] of the bunker exit already meant a danger to our lives. The ground

of the garden of the Reichs Chancellery was ploughed by shell holes . . .

In order to return to the garage I had to pass through the Fuehrer-bunker and wanted to look once more at the rooms in which the Fuehrer had lived last. I followed the personnel mentioned into the living room of the Fuehrer. Opposite the entrance of the room, the dimensions of which are only three by four meters, stood a narrow sofa. Before the right front leg of the sofa lay a Walther Pistol, 6.35 millimeters caliber, which, as I knew, belonged to Eva Braun. Also on the floor approximately before the middle of the sofa lay a Walther Pistol, 7.65 millimeters caliber. I supposed that this pistol belonged to the Fuehrer. I myself did not touch anything in the room, but silently stood there only for a few seconds. I did not put any questions, and no one else spoke to me. According to the situation it was clear to me that the Fuehrer and Eva Braun shot themselves. From the location of the two pistols I concluded that the Fuehrer sat about in the middle of the sofa before firing the shot and Eva Braun had sat on the right part of the sofa. After returning to the garage I notified my men that the Fuehrer was dead. A ceremonial was not held . . .

In the late afternoon of 1 May 1945, I received official notice from SS Sturmbannfuehrer Guensche, who was the kommandant of the Reichs Chancellery, that on the same evening at 2100 hours [9:00 P.M.] the break from the Chancellery was to take place . . .

The persons included in the break assembled at 2100 hours in the coal-bunker of the new Reichs Chancellery . . . The

persons assembled there may have amounted to 500 to 700, among them a number of women. All available weapons, rifles, submachine guns, pistols, automatic carbines, light machine guns, and Panzerfauste were distributed . . . But ten or 20 meters behind the second roadblock we received strong machine-gun fire from all sides and had to retreat again. Further breakout attempts failed.

Later on, five or six (German) tanks and armored reconnaissance cars arrived which were manned by soldiers. It was decided that the tanks were to attempt the breakthrough and that the men who had broken out of the Reichs Chancellery were to advance under the protection of the tanks. Behind one tank state secretary Dr. Naumann went as the first in the top of the tank-turret, behind him Martin Bormann followed by SS Standartenfuehrer Dr. Stumpfegger. I went behind Dr. Stumpfegger. More men joined us. After the tank had gone about 30 to 40 meters, it received a direct hit with a Panzerfaust. The tank flew apart. I saw a short flash of lightning and flew to the ground, where I remained lying unconscious. My last impression was that Dr. Naumann, Bormann, and Dr. Stumpfegger fell together and remained lying . . .

“I firmly believe every bit of Kempka’s statement is true. He couldn’t invent any part of it,” says Reynitz. He seems weary, and I decide to go.

“Auf Wiedersehen,” I say. “Your memory and expression of events is phenomenal. It is great to see you after so many years.” I thank him profusely and depart. But we will keep in touch over the next year.



The author with Hitler military-conference recorder Ewald Reynitz in 1985.