

# Berchtesgaden



GIs who captured Hitler's mountain hideaway found rubble and magnificence. Amid the ruins there was still plenty of evidence of the high style in which the Nazi *Fuehrer* used to live.

By Sgt. HARRY SIONS  
YANK Staff Correspondent

**B**ERCHTESGADEN, GERMANY—The *Fuehrerstrasse*, a low, winding road that leads high up to what had been Adolf Hitler's mountain retreat above Berchtesgaden, was heavy with traffic. GIs and French troops in jeeps, trucks and swanky captured limousines and on foot were going to and from the *Berghof*, Hitler's home, and the vast estate of buildings and grounds that surround it.

A few days before, units of the 3d Infantry Division, closely followed by French troops of the Seventh Army, had swept into the town of Berchtesgaden and up to the *Berghof* itself. The GIs and the Frenchmen were now staging a celebration—for this was VE-Day—on the rubble grounds and buildings, and in what is left of the house that Hitler built.

There was a lot to celebrate with, too, for in the wine cellars of Hitler's house, and especially in the cellars of the *Platterhof*—the great guest hotel on the grounds—were thousands of bottles of fine French wines, cognac, champagne and Rhine wines. In the storerooms of the *Platterhof* were enough dishes, silverware and frozen and canned goods to last for years; for "10 years maybe," one of Hitler's servants said, "until the war has been decided." But the war had been decided 10 years ahead of schedule, and the wine, the food, the silverware and countless other objects were disappearing with amazing speed.

The downstream of trucks, jeeps, limousines and men on foot lengthened. Moroccans in red fezzes trundled enormous portraits which they were almost certain to toss away in a short time. GIs on foot carried bottles which they were almost certain to drink in a short time, and in fact there were many who had already drunk heavily of the *Fuehrer's* hospitality, for all along the grounds were strewn empty bottles that had held Burgundy, Moselle, champagne and other wines.

At the gate to the informal entrance into the grounds, where SS men used to keep guard, an MP good-naturedly sweated over the difficult traffic, and from the window of the adjoining concrete house, where the SS guards lived, a large white flag waved in the mountain breeze.

A French six-by-six lumbered down the road. From a chain on its rear end hung a deer caught in Hitler's woods, blood dripping from her throat, her lips still quivering. The Frenchmen grinned and shouted and waved bottles of wine. A sleek black Mercedes-Benz—Hitler's powerful, six-wheeled touring car—was jammed into the ditch beside the road, as though caught suddenly by an air attack, but it was being moved out of the way.

In the great banquet hall of the *Platterhof*, where the *Gauleiters* of the National Socialist Party often met to decide the party program, a Bechstein grand piano still stood—in the center of the ruins—and a lone GI was playing "Deep in the Heart of Texas," one-finger style. In the spacious hallway marking the entrance to the *Berghof* itself, a 3d Division rifleman and two French soldiers sat around a mahogany table taking turns swigging from a bottle of Moselle.



## Berchtesgaden



**Hitler's housemaid Elly Danat said that  
"... the Fuehrer was a good master."**

"Heil Hitler, the bastard," toasted the GI.

"Heil bastard," the Frenchmen echoed happily.

It is hard to tell which caused more damage to the *Berghof* estate, the 350 Lancasters which bombed it on the morning of April 25 or the 2,000 SS men who are said to have looted and burned it a few days before the Americans arrived; the net result, in any case, is a "*Truemmerhaufen*"—a mountain of ruins—as one of Hitler's servants described it.

Most of the buildings are gutted beyond recognition. The guest house where Mussolini once lived was directly hit by bombs. The home of Martin Bormann, the *Reichsleiter* or Nazi party head, adjoins the *Berghof* but it too has been smashed to rubble. Hermann Goering's home, on a small hill above the *Fuehrer's* retreat, seems to sway in the wind like a crazy house of cards, an empty house except for the enormous bathtub which had been flown from Berlin two years ago.

Some of the other buildings, however have escaped with lighter damage. The *Gutshof*, for example—a group of long, low green-painted farm buildings on a ridge below the *Fuehrer's* house—is almost untouched, although the stock has been taken away by local residents who apparently



**Entrance to luxuriously furnished  
tunnels under the *Berghof*.**

welcomed the chance to get some fresh meat at Hitler's expense.

Two large stone houses, one the hostel for the Nazi youth organizations and the other a guest house for the Nazi press, are also damaged only lightly. But the other buildings are piles of rubble, and, when the Americans arrived, some of the ruins still smoked from fires that were started days before. Also smoking were the heavy green camouflage nets over most of the buildings. Hundreds of the tall slender pines, which thickly wooded Hitler's estate, lay broken like matchsticks from the bombing concussions; sections of the woods were stripped bare from direct hits. Tiny waterfalls from the hills rippled over the debris of paper, books, bricks, stone and empty wine bottles.

Officers roamed through the woods looking for secret caches of arms, or pillboxes, but the only

OldMagazineArticles.com



## Berchtesgaden

pillboxes were two in front of the home of the SS commander, on the west wing of the *Berghof*. So far there were no signs of "enormous caves loaded with arms," or "electrically wired booby traps," or "mined areas," or anything else resembling the lurid descriptions of what was supposed to have been the core of the inner *Festung*, the national redoubt, the fortress within a fortress where Hitler and his fellow martyrs were to make a last-ditch stand.

"It looks to me," said an infantry colonel, "like they were expecting to defend the place with wine bottles."

"... the *Fuehrer* was a good master," said Elly Danat, who has been a housemaid in the *Berghof* for eight years. Her husband, an SS sergeant killed at Moscow, left her four small children. "My children shall know the *Fuehrer* was a good man," she said. "He lived a good life, a clean life."



German men and women soldiers in an enclosure at Berchtesgaden.

**I**n the old days during the *Kampfzeit*—the period of struggle before the *Fuehrer* became *Reichschancellor*—life had been simple here. There were only two maids, the house was small, there were few visitors. Then things changed. Important people came, there were receptions, new wings were added to the *Berghof*, new buildings were erected on the grounds.

"But the *Fuehrer* never changed. He still was good, still asked me about my children. He sent condolences when my husband was killed."

She earned 70 marks, or about \$18 a month, the usual rate for a housemaid. On Christmas she received an extra 150 marks and some clothes for the children. Sometimes there were tips from the guests. Dr. Goebbels was a generous tipper. He always left money for the staff after his visits to the *Berghof*.

"Why did the Americans destroy the *Fuehrer's* home?" she asked. "Some people in Germany did not always do right, but the *Fuehrer* always knew what was right for the people."

She held her braided head proudly. "Yes, my children shall know about him." Then she asked: "Are the Jews coming back? Tell me, will they kill my children?"

In the basement of the *Berghof* a large switchboard is still in perfect condition, and even the last-minute jottings of the telephone operator are untouched. Under the long glass on the switchboard desk are the printed lists of important numbers, and the estate telephone directory rests on its side. In the basement the laundry and sewing room equipment is unharmed, although all the linen has been removed.

GIs poked about the ruins of the great reception hall on the first floor of the *Berghof*, where Hitler entertained Chamberlain, Daladier, Laval, Josef Beck of Poland, Alexander of Yugoslavia, Dollfuss of Austria and many others, after he completed the business of sealing a country's doom. It is an empty, charred room smelling of spilled wine and burned wood, and great timbers hang from the ceiling at sharp angles.

Through the great rectangle, which had once been the famous window running the entire width of the hall, GI tourists stared in admiration at the magnificent pine forests of Bavaria and beyond



## Berchtesgaden

them the white-tipped Alps of the Tyrol, Hitler's Austrian homeland and the heart of the Greater Reich. At the opposite end of the room was a bronze fireplace, decorated with designs of German soldiers of '18, '36 and '42. On the grate was an empty pack of Chesterfields.

"When the guests would leave," one of the servants said, "the *Fuehrer* would sit and stare into the fireplace. Then he would walk to the window and stare outside into the darkness in the direction of the Alps. Then he would return once more to the fire."

In what had been Hitler's *Arbeitszimmer*, or work room, on the second floor of the *Berghof*, Pvt. Clarence Overman, a rifleman of the 506th Parachute Infantry, 101st Airborne Division, sat on a closed safe, the only piece of "furniture" in the room. He was keeping guard.

"Don't know what's in the safe," said Overman, "but I guess it's important. Say, was this where the old boy worked?" Told that it was, Overman whistled.

"That's something I'll have to write home about."

Later the safe was opened; there were only a few autographed copies of *Mein Kampf* inside.

From the balcony adjoining the work room there was another view of Bavaria and the Austrian Alps.

"The *Fuehrer* liked to stand on that balcony and look at the mountains," Elly Danat said. "For a long time he would stand there and look. It gave him great pleasure."

Hitler's bedroom and bath, adjoining the work room, have been sacked, but there was enough left to indicate they had been simply furnished, although his combination bed and day-couch was burned and the rest of the furniture was gone. The bathroom was a simple affair, like those in less-expensive apartments in New York City. The sit-down toilet, washstand and tub were plain white porcelain. There was no shower; sometimes the *Fuehrer* used a rubber shower attachment fastened to the tub faucet, similar to those which used to sell for \$1.98 at any cut-rate drug store in the States. Inside the medicine chest were a bottle of castor oil, a bottle of liniment for rheumatism and a sample bottle of mouthwash marked in German: "Not to be sold in the trade."

Next to Hitler's rooms was the apartment of Eva Braun, his mistress. Her bedroom measured about 18 by 27 feet. It had a fireplace and simple maple furniture, most of which had been wrecked and looted. Scattered on the floor was some of Eva Braun's stationery, light blue, unscented, with EB in the corners; there were some of her calling cards, a couple of booklets on amateur movie photography, and a tailor's bill dated June 8, 1940, for a dress. The dress cost Hitler 500 marks, or about \$125. In one corner lay an envelope with a last-minute shopping list scribbled on the back.

Eva Braun's bathroom was simple and nothing like the Hollywood conception of the bathroom of a dictator's mistress. The wash basin, douche bowl and bathtub were plain white porcelain. Inside her medicine cabinet, above the wash basin, were a jar of Ardena skin cream, made by Elizabeth Arden of Berlin and New York, and a bottle of a disinfectant used for athlete's foot. Inside a closet were hundreds of clothes hangers and shoe trees, and a November 1942 copy of *La Femme Chic*, a Paris fashion magazine.

"Eva Braun?" said one of the housemaids. "Yes, she lived here often. We did not talk about her. It was understood we were not to mention her name outside. She was young, yes, and beautiful. She was blonde. She loved the cinema. Often we would see the pictures at night in the reception hall. American cinemas also. 'Gone With The Wind' and 'Four Feathers' and others. *Fraulein Braun* especially likes your Robert Taylor. The *Fuehrer* had no favorite movie actress. But after the war began there were no longer movies. There was no time for pleasure. It was all serious."

Under the main floor two modern movie machines stood undamaged; index volumes show that American war films were also seen by Hitler, including "The Fighting 69th."

A French captain went down a long staircase—hundreds of steps—that led from the back of the main house to the great tunnels of the *Fuehrer's*

OldMagazineArticles.com



## Berghofsgaden

Bunker, or air-raid shelter. At the foot of the staircase were long, white-walled tunnels leading to a maze of elaborate rooms and sections.

"Oh la la," cried the French captain. "It is *magnifique*, no?"

**T**HERE were sections for living quarters, including the adjoining apartments of Hitler and Eva Braun; other sections contained elaborate wine cellars honeycombed to hold thousands of bottles, now all gone. There were storerooms for countless books, many of them gifts to Hitler from party members and foreign friends, including a large enamel-covered picture book from Benito Mussolini entitled "*Italia Imperia*," a history of the New Roman Empire. In this book were many pictures of Hitler's visits to Italy, Hitler and *Il Duce* walking side by side on streets in Florence and Rome between crowded lanes of applauding Italians—and guards.

There were many technical books on engineering, war strategy and politics and an old German translation of Shakespeare. The more important volumes and manuscripts had the *Fuehrer's* bookmark "*Ex libris—Adolf Hitler*," with fancy swastika designs on the fly leaves. There was a storeroom for pictures and old manuscripts, but it had been looted and only a few worthless pictures remained.

One of the air-raid sections contained a fully equipped operating room, now pretty much ruined. French troops put bullet holes through the X-ray machine; drugs, medical instruments, injecting needles, scales and sterilizers lay on the floor. A bottle of blood plasma stood in a corner and in all the wreckage it almost looked as though it were waiting to be kicked over.

Eva Braun's bedroom in the air-raid shelter was tastefully decorated with pastel-tinted walls, dainty flowered vases and tinsel-clothed dolls scattered about. In her swanky study were built-in book shelves with books whose titles indicate that *Fraulein Braun* did considerable boning up on the program and principles of the National Socialists. There were also a set of Shakespeare, a translation of the "*Adventures of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn*," and an autographed book from Bruno Mussolini concerning his flying adventures over Spain and Ethiopia. On her bureau dresser were two books which were obviously favorites; one was called "*The Kaiser of Rome against the King of the Jews*," and the other was an autographed copy of the book "*On the Road to Victory, or With the Fuehrer in Poland*," by Otto Dietrich, chief of the Reich press division.

"When the war came on us," said Ellen Bluethgen, Hitler's personal cook, "the *Fuehrer* would eat no butter and no milk, except sometimes skimmed milk. For breakfast he had mashed apples and a biscuit; lunch was perhaps a vegetable plate and a cup of cocoa or herb tea—the *Fuehrer* ate no meat, drank no coffee, no wines. His best meal was tea, at 6 o'clock, when he had a cup of tea and a piece of apple *Strudel*. It was his favorite dish. At tea he could relax a little, perhaps even whistle. He especially liked to whistle light-opera tunes from Franz Lehar. He whistled well too. Otherwise," she added with a glimmer of a smile that briefly lit up her sallow tight-lipped features, "he would not have whistled so often."

The servants still considered Hitler a tin god.

**T**HE *Fuehrer* had not visited the *Berghof* since June 1944, they said with regret. He was too busy with the war. But before that he spent his happiest days here. In the winter he sometimes went sledding down the *Fuehrerstrasse* and spent hours listening to Wagner records, with the fire-place burning brightly. But then the war came and it was all changed. The *Fuehrer* became more serious, rarely joked, rarely whistled.

"He suffered much for the sake of his people," said his personal cook.

The *Fuehrer's* health was always good, she said, even in the hard times. He lived a good life, a healthy life. And his mind, too, was always sharp and clear, to the last days. He had a throat operation last year, but it wasn't serious; it affected his voice for only a short time.

"Is it true," we asked her, "that the *Fuehrer* chewed on rugs when he became excited?"



## Berchtesgaden

Ellen Bluethgen, the cook, flushed angrily.

"Only you Americans believe such nonsense," she replied.

She always travelled with Hitler, except when he visited the front. Even during State dinners, when the *Fuehrer* entertained King Leopold of Belgium, the ambassador from Japan and others, she cooked specially for Hitler, while the chefs prepared the full-course dinners for the guests. When Molotov came in there were seven extra chefs for the evening reception.

"It was a very elaborate affair," she added with a wry smile.

Goering used to go into the kitchen and ask for rich, greasy dishes. He was proud of being fat, and would only laugh when the *Fuehrer* rebuked him for his gross tastes.

"The *Fuehrer* had no doubles," she said emphatically: "That is some more American nonsense. Why should he have doubles? He had nothing to fear. He was a good man. He loved his people, and during the war spent much time visiting the wounded in hospitals and the people in bombed cities."

"Did he visit Dachau, too?" we asked.

"Why should he visit Dachau?" she replied. "The *Fuehrer* was too busy to waste time with criminals." She wrung her hands nervously: "Yes, the *Fuehrer* is dead now. What else could he do but die for his people? But for many of us he will never die. He was good to us," she kept repeating. Then she hesitated and asked, "What will happen to me now? I am a good cook. Will it be possible for me to obtain a position somewhere?"

We said we didn't know.

It was late in the day now. The stream of traffic going down the *Fuehrerstrasse* had thinned. At the foot of the hill Pfc. William Crawford and T-5 George Liekhues, 3d Division medics, were looking dreamily up the road, staring at the smoke clouds still floating over the charred ruins of the house that Hitler built.

"When I was at Salerno," said Crawford, "I never figured I'd wind up the war in Hitler's home."

"Can't think of a better place to wind up the war at," said Liekhues.

"Unless it's my home," Crawford smiled.

# YANK

JUNE 22, 1945: p. 1