

The Strange Death of Heinrich Himmler



by JOHN C. SCHWARZWALDER

There have been many conflicting accounts of the death of Heinrich Himmler, some of them pure speculation. Here is the authentic, eye-witness story told by a member of the intelligence division of the Army Service Forces. Maj. John C. Schwarzwaldler went overseas with Patton's western task force and became intelligence officer for the Port of Casablanca. In the invasion of Southern France, he had charge of intelligence activities in Marseilles and Toulon, and later at Bijon, Liege and the Ardennes. Maj. Schwarzwaldler was on the scene when Himmler died.

—THE EDITORS

A MONG THE GROUPS we were most anxious to catch after the occupation of Germany was that body of men known as the *Geheime Feld-Polizei* or Secret Field Police, composed of operatives who, while attached to the German Army, were specialists in catching Allied spies.

German intelligence had more spectacular groups, but none more capable. Proof of their efficiency is the fact that although there were hundreds of thousands of Russians, Poles, Czechs, Slovaks and men of other nationalities fighting in the German Army, there was never a serious mutiny. Another evidence of efficiency is the fact that very few were ever captured before the occupation of Germany or, if captured, identified as GFP. We in the U. S. Counter Intelligence hated their guts but had great professional respect for them.

It was natural that we wanted to nab GFP men almost as much as we wanted Gestapo-men, and the British felt the same way about it. To the great surprise, therefore, of British military police who had established a road block near the Oder River, a group of 12 rather elderly German non-coms presented themselves one May evening as dis-



charged members of the GFP, desiring passage south to their homes. What surprised the police was not the appearance of the group or even the fact that their papers were in order (which was rare in those days) but the fact that the men admitted belonging to the GFP.

The MPs promptly delivered the group to the nearest British Intelligence unit, which in turn sent them to a Preliminary Interrogation Center near Bremen. The young British officer in charge there decided something was wrong with the set-up, but he was swamped with work, as was every intelligence man at the time, so he pushed them along to the Detailed Interrogation Center, 30 miles farther away.

The British major in charge there was a capable man, but he too was literally worked to death. He called the lieutenant at the Preliminary Center and wanted to know why in hell the lieutenant was crowding his camp with non-coms from the GFP. The lieutenant explained that, while he had not had time for a complete interrogation, the papers were a little too perfect. The major was too old a hand not to respect the intuition of a trained agent, so he agreed to have a look.

The center hauled up the 12 prisoners for questioning. They were all stripped and searched, the search involving not only their clothing—shoes and shoe linings, seams of trousers and coats—but also their persons. This was not only wise but customary. There is no better way to interrogate a man than when he is standing naked before you and you are comfortably seated smoking a cigarette.

All the Germans were searched, but nothing was found. Then, as interrogation commenced, one of the Germans stepped forward. "I am the adjutant of Heinrich Himmler," he announced.

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Jaws dropped among the interrogators. They looked at one another, wondering what this was all about. A second German stepped forward.

"I am Heinrich Himmler," he said. He wore a patch over one eye and was much thinner than his pictures. The interrogators looked at him incredulously. He removed the patch from his eye, which was the same watery blue that not only Himmler's but a million other Germans' eyes were. He stood before the British officers and looked at them directly.

"I am Heinrich Himmler," he repeated in German, "and I demand to see Field Marshal Montgomery on a matter of tremendous consequence."

By this time the British officers had mentally added 20 pounds of fat and a moustache to his figure and face, and were almost convinced he *was* Himmler. They asked him a few questions, and he answered them briefly and correctly, at the same time demanding again to see Montgomery. The British asked him why.

"I have definite information," he said, "that the Russians intend to cross the Elbe either tonight or tomorrow and attack the Second British Army. I also can procure for Marshal Montgomery several German SS Divisions to enable him to defend his army."

THE OFFICER in charge told the rest of the prisoners to go back to their cells. He gave the naked Himmler a pair of shorts and an army blanket to throw around his shoulders. He called up his immediate superior and told him the news, then sat down to do an interrogation of the man who was head of the Gestapo, the Nazi Party Intelligence organization and the German Army Intelligence.

At first Himmler refused to talk to anyone less than Montgomery, but he changed his mind when the officer told him the Field Marshal was not immediately available. He answered questions briefly but completely. He said he had no time for minor matters, that he was extremely anxious to get on with the matter of resisting the Russians. He seemed convinced that, now Hitler was dead, the British and

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Americans would be fighting the Russians within a few days. His last and best mission in life, he said, was to bring the support of what was left of Germany to aid England and America in the fight against the "hordes of the East." He seemed more sincere in this than any important prisoner who had been captured up until then.

In the midst of the questioning Colonel Blimp walked in. You know the type of man I mean. As he entered all the British arose, and Himmler stood, too, expecting perhaps to see Montgomery.

Colonel Blimp looked him over carefully and said, "So you're Himmler, are you, by gad?" Himmler started to say something and Colonel Blimp roared "Shut up, you pig!" Himmler probably did not understand very much English but he understood that, all right. He shut up like a clam and never spoke another word as long as he lived.

Colonel Blimp then ordered Himmler searched again. It was explained to him that Himmler had already been searched. Colonel Blimp fixed his subordinate with a steely eye and ordered Himmler searched again. The prisoner objected violently, but his silent struggles did no good. He was searched again, thoroughly.

At the end of the search an army doctor told Himmler to open his mouth. The prisoner did so, but as the doctor put his finger in, Himmler bit down. The doctor withdrew his finger hastily. Himmler then ground his teeth together and swallowed hard. Some say he smiled grimly. In another second he was on the floor writhing in agony.

The British were on him in a moment. Himmler was strung up, head downward. His throat was flushed, emetics were given. Everything possible was done to keep him alive, but all in vain. In just 12 minutes Himmler was dead.

The vial of potassium cyanide which killed him had been cleverly fitted around a sunken wisdom tooth. All Himmler needed to do at any moment was to shift his jaw and bite down. The efforts of the British doctor to keep him alive prolonged his agony but could not save him for a later hanging.

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THE BRITISH INTELLIGENCE officers were very bitter at Colonel Blimp. He had violated a cardinal principle of interrogation: "When a prisoner is talking, let him talk. Guide his speech, bring him around to what you want to know, but do not do anything that will cause him to cease talking."

I cannot say how much the British and all of us lost by the abrupt ending of Himmler's interrogation. I do not know how much information he may have had to give, for example, on the mysterious death of Hitler or the likelihood of Goebbels being alive. I do know that he could have given a veritable treasury of information about his own organizations, about how he won control of the German Army Intelligence, about his methods of keeping the Wehrmacht in line, about the fate of many of our agents who had disappeared, about plans for the Wehrwolf organization and the tie-up of that body with the Hitler Jugend.

He could have told us which men who worked for us in Germany were agents of his, sent in to fool us. He could have told us how shot-down Allied aviators were betrayed by Gestapo men who had infiltrated into resistance organizations. There were hundreds of things he could have told us.

Personally, I should have liked to know exactly why Himmler, possessed of fabulous resources for disguise and escape, chose to pass himself off as a sergeant in the Secret Field Police. I wanted to know why he didn't get papers to prove he was a quartermaster sergeant or an artillery non-com or any one of a hundred other identities which would have reduced his chances of being caught. I wanted to know if the real reason he equipped himself with GFP papers was so that he could not be stopped by ordinary German troops while getting away. I wanted to know why he was heading for Munich, as he told the military police. Whom was he expecting to meet there?

I think the whole world wants to know why he maintained the horror camps at Dachau and Buchenwald and Belsen. I would like to know how a reasonably well-brought-up man (and he was) and a reasonably well-educated man (and he was)

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could be the perpetrator of such activities. Where and from whom did he get the idea that he was second only to Hitler and that Hitler was second not even to God? What causes such a man to tick? How does the mechanism run?

Well, thanks to Colonel Blimp, we shall never know the answers. Yet all of us made enough mistakes in the war not to blame the Colonel too much. After all, those who made the first search did not find the cyanide.

The rest of the story is brief. The Russians sent over three high officers to look at the remains and determine whether this was really Himmler. They went away satisfied. The day after, a party of British officers and men carried the body to a lonely spot in the woods of North Germany. There they buried it. They swore an oath never to reveal the location of the grave, and they will keep that oath.

There were no prayers, no tears. The greatest mass murderer of all time had gone back to earth—and it seems doubtful that even God will have mercy on his soul.



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