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The Eagle's Nest: The Invisible City Where Hitler Directed the War

John Terrell, NEWSWEEK war correspondent, visited the site of Adolf Hitler's former western headquarters, the Adlerhorst (Eagle's Nest), 5 miles west of Bad Nauheim in Central Germany. After talking with one of the few remaining employes, he sends this remarkable picture of what life was like in the Adlerhorst—the most detailed account of how the Führer and his staff operated that has yet come out of conquered Germany.

Here Hitler often strolled in the afternoon on a 25-foot wide private walk of fine red gravel. Here Hitler, Hermann Göring, and Field Marshals Karl von Rundstedt and Albert Kesselring drafted military plans and directed fighting in the west. Here also Hitler came as recently as three months ago to brood in solitude, bathe in the thermal waters, and speculate moodily upon the dark shadow of destruction moving across his world. Often in the still, dark pine forest during the past year Hitler sought to gather the shreds of his shattered dreams and schemes.

A Hit on Kesselring: Completed in 1939, the Adlerhorst was once a subterranean city, with accommodations for 3,000 persons in the labyrinth so deep underground no bomb could penetrate. Away to each side sweep high, heavily forested hills and small valleys with cold brooks and meadows now emerald with spring grass and fringed with pink and white blossoms.

The Adlerhorst is invisible from the adjoining heights as well as from the air. Small parts above ground were so completely camouflaged that they were not found by searching bombers until last month. Our planes destroyed nearby villages in the hope of hitting it.

On March 19 they found the target. One 500-pound bomb fell near Hitler's quarters, failing to explode. But another struck the building in which Field Marshal Kesselring was lunching with guests. The heavy chandelier crashed down on the lunch table. The new Nazi western commander received a deep gash across his cheek. Armaments Minister Albert Speer suffered shock from the blast.

In miles of underground tunnels, countless rooms were occupied by military headquarters. Big Diesel engines which supplied power for lights, switchboards, telegraph, a radio station, and the air-conditioning system are still in good working order. Adjoining are immense service quarters, kitchens containing modern electrical equipment, garages, spacious soundproof conference rooms, and a motion-picture theater.

The Adlerhorst is about 7½ miles in circumference. It is surrounded by 10-

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foot-high barbed-wire fences and was patrolled by more than 300 specially trained and selected guards armed with machine guns. Always one ring of guards looked outward while another ring watched inward. Numerous police dogs accompanied the guards, and alarms could be flashed from a net of telephone posts.

Silence! Hitler Thinks: The Führer went to the Adlerhorst last December, leaving it for the last time Jan. 6. My guide last saw him New Year's afternoon. Hitler's shoulders were bent. His left arm and left side appeared slightly stiffened. His hair was gray. He walked slowly. When he gestured with his hand there was a noticeable lack of vigor in the motion.

In December Mussolini visited Hitler at the Adlerhorst. Several times the two strolled together along the private walk, completely covered by camouflage netting that blends amazingly with the dark-green boughs of the pines on each side.

Hitler's routine was fixed during the last winter visit. Frequently he held a morning conference with Rundstedt. It was at the Adlerhorst that the Ardennes offensive was planned and directed. Hitler finished lunch each day about 1, nearly always eating in solitary splendor. After lunch he took a walk while absolute silence was maintained everywhere. No one was permitted to approach the walk, no voice was heard. Even the dogs guarding the fence were shut up in their kennels. Each afternoon the Führer attended a private film showing. Then he relaxed for a short period on the couch in his private office. After the nap he received generals and associates if necessary. Generally he had dinner guests and afterwards there was music. He bathed each night before retiring at about midnight.

High Jinks at No. 2: Hitler's private house, designated No. 1, contained eight rooms, none very large—a sitting room, an office, a dressing room, two bedrooms, a dining room, a kitchen, and a reception room. The bathroom, in plain white, was of modest proportions. The house was electrically heated and air-conditioned but Hitler frequently complained that he was unable to adjust the temperature to his liking. One night last winter he raised a terrible rumpus because it was too cold. The air-conditioning engineer was brought in after midnight by three Gestapo agents who watched closely as he repaired the controls. The engineer was not permitted to speak while in the house.

Hitler entered the Adlerhorst by a private road which none other was permitted to use. It led directly to an underground entrance to a bomb shelter below his living quarters. He drove from a nearby secret airport with an entourage of fourteen cars. The only man permitted to move at will in Hitler's house was his valet, an ex-army sergeant named Linge.

There were five other private dwellings much like Hitler's. House No. 2 was the casino or banquet hall, where Hitler entertained at large dinners and visiting dignitaries took their meals. No. 3 was for the commanding general of the west. Nos. 4 and 5 were for Joseph

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Goebbels, who lived in one, and used the other for a propaganda bureau where he recorded Hitler's priceless statements, wrote speeches, and dreamed up historical outbursts. No. 6 was the living quarters for members of the High Command.

Last New Year's Eve Hitler entertained about 40 high-ranking guests, including Göring, Goebbels, Heinrich Himmler, Joachim von Ribbentrop, and many generals and field marshals. One special dish contained 500 eggs. Hundreds of magniums of the finest champagne were opened. Hitler ate a favorite dish—roast goose. There were many dinner wines, and later, brandies and liqueurs, some so rare that only a few bottles were available even to Hitler. A battalion of maids worked until daylight cleaning up the debris, washing the exquisite china, glassware, and old silver.

Swastika in the Dust: Early in March Rundstedt conferred with Hitler at Berchtesgaden, after which the field marshal returned to the Adlerhorst. Assertedly, Rundstedt had made the fatal error of trying to be rational, advising Hitler that further attempts at resistance would be national suicide, and advocating the strongest attempts to secure a negotiated if unfavorable peace.

Later, one of Hitler's staff officers was heard to ask Rundstedt: "Well, field marshal, what may we expect to do next?" Rundstedt replied: "We can still wiggle our ears, but that's about all we can hope to do."

On March 9 Kesselring arrived at the Adlerhorst in full command of the west. On March 12 Rundstedt departed. On March 19 the bombing in which Kesselring was wounded occurred. On March 20 came orders from Hitler: Destroy the Adlerhorst.

The order was immediately executed. Records and some valuables were removed. Then soldiers poured Diesel oil throughout the dwellings and demolition engineers planted explosives.

The Eagle's Nest is now a blackened, blasted ruin. The thick concrete floors of Hitler's house were ripped apart. His kitchen is a pile of broken dishes. Only in one pile of debris can you find his emblem—the Nazi eagle and swastika.