

HITLER'S FINAL HOURS



BY JAMES COLLIER

LAST MAY, a man named Adolf Eichman was picked up in Argentina by members of a select Israeli Intelligence unit, whisked out of the country, and subsequently revealed to the world as a long-sought Nazi who had played a major role in the extermination of some six million Jews.

Immediately upon the heels of the announcement of Eichmann's capture, an ancient but hardy rumor sprang up from a five-year's sleep. Adolf Hitler, the one-time evil genius of Germany, was alive and healthy in Patagonia, Argentina, a mountainous area in the province of Chubut. The rumor, of course, had been quiescent. Since the collapse of Nazi Germany in the spring of 1945, it had risen over a dozen times. Reports that Hitler was still alive began *before he could possibly have been dead*. On April 27, 1945, a Swedish dispatch stated that Wilhelm Bartholdy, a Hitler double, was to be filmed dying on the barricades of Berlin as Hitler escaped elsewhere.

This was only the first of the rumors. On June 10, 1945, Russian General Georgi Zhukov, conqueror of Berlin, said he believed Hitler was alive.

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On July 16, 1945, a *Chicago Times* correspondent in Montevideo, Uruguay, told his paper that he was "virtually certain" that Hitler and his consort Eva Braun were on a German-owned estate in Patagonia. The following day two unidentified submarines were seen off San Clemente del Tuyu, Argentina, giving credence to the rumors.

ON AUGUST 14, 1945, the *New York Times* reported that a number of British officers believed that Hitler was in the North German province of Schleswig-Holstein with bogus army papers, awaiting discharge.

Three days later it was discovered that port authorities in Boston were screening passengers against the chance that Hitler was among them. On the same day rumors were published that he was in Japan, Argentina, and Sweden. The next November he was "seen" in Hamburg.

On October 6, 1947, a woman test pilot named Hanna Reitsch, who had been a confidante of Hitler's, recanted previous Nuremberg trial testimony and declared he was still alive. The day before, the Polish paper *Wieczor* quoted German Air Force Pilot Captain Peter Baumgart as saying that he flew Hitler and Eva Braun to Denmark on the eve of the collapse of Berlin.

On December 11, 1947, the Russians blew up Hitler's bunker in Berlin, destroying any further efforts to examine the Fuehrer's last residence and thereby giving credence to another batch of rumors that he was still alive.

Rumors flourished again in 1952 when Hitler's sister, Paula Wolf, penniless and on relief, tried and failed to get a death certificate for

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the former Fuehrer so she could share his meager estate. And there were reports he was still alive in October of 1955 when the Russians released some of the men who had been with Hitler in the last days. Even the issuance of Hitler's death certificate at Berchtesgaden by Judge Henrich Stephanus did not put a halt to the rumors, as the report last June from Patagonia shows. In spite of voluminous investigation by trained officials of three nations, the story that Hitler is alive will not die.

This is not surprising. The Roman despot Nero showed a similarly persistent after-life, and the reports that Napoleon was in good health did not quiet down until a hundred years after his birth.

People, the noted sociologist Ernst Cassirer—who fled Hitler in 1932—suggested, often violently “deny and defy the fact of death”; if the powerful are thrown down, what chance has the ordinary human?

Psychological theorizing aside, there is one common-sense reason why the rumors of Hitler's existence persist: The suspicion that where there is so much smoke there must be fire. This attitude is enormously strengthened by one clear and indisputable fact: not so much as one single inch of Hitler's flesh has ever been publicly displayed anywhere.

Let us start then and see what the real facts are. Officially, England, the United States, and Germany agree on the facts about Hitler's last days. (Neither Russia nor Israel, which has a strong emotional stake in the issue, takes an official stand on the matter.) The English-American-German story follows.

In the latter days of April, 1945, Hitler and his higher officials were



In last hours, Hitler summoned test pilot Hanna Reitsch for top-secret mission

in Berlin. The Allies were closing the noose rapidly and it was clear to everybody except Hitler that the war was lost. A plan was made for an escape to the Bavarian Alps around Berchtesgaden some 300 miles to the south, where a last stand would be made. The date set for the flight was April 20, Hitler's 56th birthday. Hitler, however, hesitated. On April 21 he ordered an all-out attack on the Russians outside Berlin. The attack was never mounted for the good reason that the German armies of the city had barely enough strength for defensive action. On the 22nd, Hitler, feeling betrayed and defeated, suffered a mental near-breakdown. Col. Gen. Alfred Jodl, who was present, testified before his own death by hanging as a war criminal that Hitler raged like a madman in a three-hour speech, and then announced he would die in Berlin.

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Russian General Zhukov, conquerer of Berlin, echoed Stalin: Hitler still lived. Thereafter he became calmer and paid only perfunctory attention to the war—a state broken only by sudden wild and impossible dreams that somehow the situation could be saved.

The Fuehrer was living in a huge cement bunker 50 feet underground in the yard surrounding the Reich Chancellery just off the famous Berlin park, the Tiergarten. In the bottom level of the bunker were 18 rooms. Six rooms were reserved for Hitler and his mistress, Eva Braun. One room was Hitler's study, which contained a portrait of the Fuehrer's hero, Frederick the Great.

Wandering through this underground prison, Hitler spent much time playing with his dog Blondi, who had just given birth to pups, and indulging in long, aimless conferences. He was able to sleep only three hours a night and lived almost entirely on chocolate and sweet cakes, and on barbiturates and other

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supportive drugs administered by his physician.

BETWEEN April 20 and April 24, most of his higher officials left for the south, including Hermann Goering, commander of the Luftwaffe. Remaining were Propaganda Minister Josef Goebbels, his wife and children; Eva Braun; Martin Bormann, Hitler's second in command; Eric Kempka, Hitler's personal chauffeur of long standing; Heinz Linge, his valet; and a motley group of about 20 other officials, SS guards, flunkies, and some of their wives.

On April 24, Hitler ordered Col. Gen. Ritter Von Greim, Commander of Luftwaffe Airfleet 6, to fly from Munich to Berlin. He was accompanied by ardent Hitler supporter and expert pilot Hanna Reitsch. The Russians were well into the city at some points, but the Tempelhof Airdrome, two miles from the bunker, was still in German hands. Von Greim managed to land, although he suffered a severe foot wound in the process. He expected that his job would be to fly Hitler out; but on reaching the Fuehrer he was appointed head of the Luftwaffe. Hitler was dismissing Goering.

On April 28, the Russians took the Tempelhof; but Von Greim and Hanna Reitsch managed to fly out, under impossible orders to arrest SS Chief Heinrich Himmler. The following day was Sunday, April 29. Between one and three in the morning, Hitler was married to Eva Braun by Gau Inspector Walter Wagner from the Berlin mayor's office. The marriage was witnessed by Goebbels, and others, and a wedding breakfast followed, at which Hitler spoke of suicide.

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He had told many people, including Generals Jodl, Keitel and Speer, that he intended to kill himself and have his body destroyed. In any case, at 2:30 on the morning of April 30, Hitler and Eva Braun came out of their private suite, shook hands silently with some 30 people in the bunker, and retired again. To a man, the bunker dwellers assumed he was going to commit suicide. A wild, hysterical party broke out; drinking and dancing got so noisy that orders were sent from the level below for quiet, "so that the Fuehrer may kill himself," according to one report.

BUT nothing happened. The newlyweds again appeared, at about 3 in the afternoon. They shook hands with Goebbels, Kempka, Linge, and two or three others, and returned to their quarters. A few moments later a shot was heard. The observers rushed into the room. They testified later that they found Hitler lying dead on the sofa. He had shot himself in the mouth. The sofa was covered with blood, and a 7.65mm Walther revolver lay beside it. Eva Braun was also dead. A 6.35mm Walther was beside her body, but she had not used it. She had taken poison instead.

Earlier in the day Kempka, Hitler's chauffeur, had managed to procure 180 litres of gasoline. The bodies were carried outside the bunker, soaked with gasoline, and Hitler aide Otto Guensche ignited them with a flaming rag.

THE YARD outside the bunker was under constant shelling by the Russians. The German witnesses could not observe the corpses burning, but retreated to shelter. Thereafter two

men named Mengershausen and Glanzer buried the remains of the two bodies in a shell hole. Glanzer was killed in subsequent fighting, but ten years later Mengershausen was still alive to testify that the bodies were not completely burned when he buried them; were, in fact, recognizable.

That night—April 30—May 1—several groups of high officials and ordinary body servants tried to break out of the bunker area. Our best information is all were killed or captured. On the afternoon of the next day the Russians swept into the bunker, capturing the handful who had stayed. Shortly thereafter General Zhukov announced the finding of Hitler's body. But within days Soviet dictator Stalin was declaring that Hitler was still alive, and soon Zhukov echoed Stalin's statement.

Ten years later, during the thaw which followed Stalin's death, a group of the men who had been in the bunker with Hitler—including the SS man Mengershausen who had helped in the burial—surprisingly were released from Russian jails and sent home to Germany. The newly released prisoners were questioned by British authorities, especially by Oxford historian H. R. Trevor-Roper, perhaps the foremost western expert on Hitler's final days. Piecing together their testimony, Trevor-Roper concluded that the Russians had made positive identification of Hitler's body by means of dental evidence and had hidden the body somewhere in the U.S.S.R.

THE STORY took an even more curious turn last June 6, when a Russian newspaper published pictures "taken from a documentary film" which showed Hitler dead in his

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bunker. Perhaps prompted by the Eichmann capture the Russians—without saying anything officially—now wanted the world to believe that Hitler was gone for good. But a close examination of the pictures casts serious doubt on their authenticity. No member of the bunker group who survived mentions any filming of Hitler's body after his death, nor was there any reason why such pictures should have been taken by the Germans. On the other hand, if the Russians had made the pictures, they certainly would have taken better ones; the picture of the body is neither clear nor very large. The shrewdest current guess would be that the pictures came from a fictional—not documentary—film which Stalin ordered in his own glorification around 1950.

The foregoing, then, is the most credited account, pieced together from the latest information. In terms of ordinary intelligence work, the U.S.-English-German position holds up all along the line. But as we have seen, it is not necessarily believed.

In order to settle the matter one way or another we must examine the whole story from a different point of view. And it begins with this fact: Hitler was in the bunker on April 30. More than 20 people—many who had been close to Hitler for years—shook hands with him at about 2:30 A.M. and testified to this fact after the war was over. They could not have been fooled by a double.

The second important fact is that by midnight of that same day escape was impossible. Three parties tried to break out but none succeeded. Hitler, therefore, *had* to leave Berlin



Russian newspaper claimed reproduced film clip shows Hitler moments after "suicide"
(This image was later confirmed to have been that of Hitler's double - THE EDITOR)

sometime during April 30, if he were to escape the noose the 1st West Russian Army was tightening around the Reich Chancellery area.

Now let us suppose that Hitler did escape. How could he have done so? By what means?

He could not, as rumor has had it, fly to Sweden. The Swedes, officially neutral but generally sympathetic to the Allies, would not have permitted any plane to land without thorough investigation of its occupants. Aside from Sweden, there was *absolutely not one foot of friendly territory* within plane-flight of Berlin.

The only possible escape plan was the one most suggested by rumor. Suppose in some manner Hitler had broken through the Russian forces ringing Berlin and made his way down the rapidly narrowing corridor of German-held territory to the south and Bavaria. Suppose that here a plane had been waiting to carry him to a submarine.

Since all of the coast of Europe was in Allied hands by April 30, 1945, the plane would have had to have been amphibious, and the transfer to the submarine would have had to take place at sea, either in the Adriatic or the Mediterranean. Suppose then that the subma-



Blown-up bunker, hideout for Hitler and Eva Braun, was said to be dual "death" site

rine had proceeded through the Gibraltar Straits and across the Atlantic to Argentina.

We know, in any case, that submarines *were* sighted off the Argentine coast on July 17. We know further that at that time there were many German expatriates and Nazi sympathizers in Argentina. A month later a group of them rioted in Buenos Aires, cheering Hitler's name. Suppose further that making his way to shore on a life raft, Hitler had met by prearrangement with Argentine sympathizers, who hid him away on one of the big German estates in the country. And finally, suppose he is there still.

The foregoing is improbable, but possible. It would have meant a 300-mile flight through Allied air, over Allied-held territory. It would have meant a 3000-mile submarine journey through Allied waters. It would have meant eluding Argentine intelligence forces for some 15 years.

But there is one weak link in the chain. And that is at the very beginning. In order to make such a journey, Hitler had to get out of Berlin. There are only three ways he could have done so: by plane, by tank or other vehicle, or by foot.

Escape by plane. By the evening of

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April 30, Russian forces were within 500 yards of Hitler's Chancellery bunker. The entire area was under constant bombardment. Russian troops were at the edge of the Tiergarten, and they had approached to within 100 yards of Charlottenburger Chausee, the only large, straight stretch of street near the bunker. To take Hitler out, a light plane would have had to land either in the Tiergarten or the Charlottenburger Chausee. The Tiergarten can be ruled out: heavily wooded, it had no flat stretch for a plane to land on. This leaves the Charlottenburger Chausee. But a light plane, without armor, would have had to fly over Russian-held Berlin, land, pick up its passenger, and fly out again. The crucial part of the operation would have had to have taken place *within a hundred yards of Russian troops*. Any competent rifleman can kill a man at a hundred yards. A machine gunner would not have had trouble riddling such a plane. Furthermore, Russian shells were pounding the area. And to top it off, the Red Air Force would certainly have been alerted to the presence of the intruder. Tracking a small training plane and shooting it down would have been an easy task for Red fighter pilots. Therefore, *Hitler could not possibly have left Berlin by plane*.

Escape by tank. German forces in Berlin still had a few tanks and other vehicles. In theory, one of them could have picked up Hitler, and forced a path through the city to the south, where a plane could have picked him up. But on April 30, 1945, Berlin was clogged to the point of confusion with Russian

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tanks. The Russians had been pouring armor into the city—not for the purposes of war, but to celebrate their May Day Holiday, with a vast parade designed to show the German people the extent of Russian might. A German tank pushing through the city would have been blocked not only by Russian guns, but the traffic jam caused by May Day preparations. Therefore, *Hitler could not have escaped from Berlin by tank.*

Escape by foot. This last alternative was the method which failed the escapees the following day. But that is not the whole case. Until the night before Hitler theoretically shot himself, people had been able to enter and leave the bunker area, although with considerable difficulty. On the 29th, three men bearing copies of Hitler's will—a wild document blaming the Jews for the loss of the war and assigning the Nazi State to the care of Admiral Doenitz—managed an escape. It was not easy. They had to run the streets of Berlin under Russian fire, swim two rivers, and then travel on foot 25 miles. Could Hitler have done likewise?

According to British intelligence, Hitler was suffering from “trembling hands and general decrepitude” during this period. Another source reports him a “shaky, enfeebled, raving and prematurely old man of 56.” Medical reports now available state that the bomb explosion in the attempt on his life the previous summer had injured his arm and foot. By September, 1944, worn by tension and the disintegration of his empire, he was suffering continual headaches and stomach cramps. A

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polyp on his vocal cords gave him pain and was removed at that time. In addition, he had a severe infection of his maxillary sinus.

In February of 1945, Luftwaffe Captain Gerhard Boldt had an interview with Hitler. After the war, Boldt reported that Hitler's "... head was slightly wobbling. His left arm hung slackly and his hand trembled a good deal. His face and the parts around his eyes gave the impression of total exhaustion. All his movements were of a senile old man. . . ."

By April, his physical condition must inevitably have been worse. Weeks of despair, of underground living and of constant bombardment must assuredly have brought him near total collapse. He was sleeping only a few hours daily, and eating mostly sweets.

It was, then, plainly impossible for a man in such condition to walk very far unaided, much less swim across the River Spree, which represented the only route out of Berlin. If healthy men, like Kempka and Linge could not make it (they tried to break out with one of the groups about midnight of the 30th but were captured), how was this ruined and broken old man to get through the tight Russian ring?

He was not; and therefore, *Hitler could not have walked out of Berlin.*

And that effectively finishes the story. The evidence that Hitler died in Berlin, amassed by British and American Intelligence groups, is overwhelming. But even if it is questioned, even if somehow all the last witnesses could have concocted a single story and held to it tightly enough to fool highly trained interrogators; even if plane and subma-

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rine could have escaped Allied detection; even if Hitler's own closest comrades were wrong in their estimation of his determination to commit suicide; even if all these things were so, it is still impossible that Hitler could have left Berlin on April 30.

AND so the book can finally be closed. Adolf Hitler is 15 years dead. No other possibility exists. But just wait. By this time next year another report will come out of Patagonia and some people will be saying, "If Adolf Eichmann managed to stay alive, why couldn't Adolf Hitler?" Good men are oft interred with their bones: the evil live on long after. ■ ■

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