

Pathfinder

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Stalin & the Nazis

Early in April 1945, a green-uniformed Nazi motorcycle courier roared up to a chateau outside the Harz Mountain village of Degenershausen. He carried a telegram from Berlin for Baron von Griesheim. The baron, custodian of German Foreign Office records hidden away in four chateaux, was ordered to burn every last document.

For once in his life von Griesheim did not bow to the will of his Nazi masters. When Gen. Omar N. Bradley's First Army stormed into Degenershausen a few days later they found the records of German foreign relations from 1871 to 1944 stowed away in brown paper packages. And the baron was waiting with a master catalogue and this explanation for his refusal to obey Berlin's orders:

Bonfire. "To fool a few stupid Nazis stationed here, I burned some old newspapers. But the documents I did not touch. I believe they must be saved so that the historians of the future may determine the facts and the responsibility for this terrible war."

Because of von Griesheim's disobedience, the U.S. last fortnight had powerful new ammunition for the "cold war" with Russia. In a 362-page volume, the Department of State published documents which told of German-Soviet relations in the crucial period from 1939 to 1941.

Romance. The documents show how Stalin, through Molotov, wooed Hitler. And Hitler, who in *Mein Kampf* characterized Stalin & Co. as "common blood-stained criminals" and "the scum of humanity," was responsive. Out of the love feast came the Russian-German non-aggression pact, signed Aug. 23, 1939.

The pact contained a secret protocol by which Russia and Germany agreed to team up against British and U.S. interests in Europe, Africa and Asia, and divide the spoils. But after the fall of Poland, within six weeks of the signing of the pact, Moscow and Berlin were wrangling.

Germany's mounting military successes worried the Russians. While Hitler's ambassador in Moscow was kept busy easing Stalin's fears, the German high command drew the plans for Operation Barbarossa, blueprint for a "quick" conquest of Russia.

Change of Heart. In June 1941, Hitler, having decided "England has lost this war," struck at Russia. In explaining his decision in a letter to Mussolini, Hitler wrote: "I again feel spiritually free. The partnership with the Soviet Union . . . was . . . often very irksome to me."

The Russian propaganda machine, usually quick on the trigger, was slow to answer the telling shots of the State Department exposé. Meantime, the Voice of America (see page 20) beamed the story to Russia and the rest of the world.