

Chapter 27

December 1945

The five recorders meet with me again in the evening at my living quarters.

“We left off last time with the failure of the Ardennes Offensive, which Allied forces called the Battle of the Bulge. Who would like to start?” I ask.

“I’ll do it,” says Reynitz. “But first everyone should be aware that Hitler had a split personality. He lived in two worlds—reality and fantasy.” Everyone looks at Reynitz.

“In the real world, Hitler dismissed from his mind military reverses. When I was on the headquarters train, he refused to look at bombed German cities or wounded German soldiers. As far as I know, he never saw a concentration camp. He usually shut his mind to anything unpleasant.

“In the fantasy world, Hitler predicted that if the Russians came too close, the Allies would certainly join his troops in the fight against the Russians because the Allies hated Communism as much as the Germans. If the Allies chose not to fight with us but fought the Russians directly, we would wait until they became exhausted, then come out of the National Redoubt in the Alps, to make victory ours. This was his constant hope. The hope was dashed when Himmler sent only half of the 80,000 SS troops he had ordered,” Reynitz recalls.

“Hitler was a dreamer, wasn’t he?”

“Yes, and worse than that, he was a liar,” Reynitz continues.

“Goebbels was on the radio almost every day telling how the unconditional surrender demanded by the Allies would mean disaster. For example, he gave one illustration after another of how the advancing Russians raped women and killed captured German prisoners in Prussia—by the thousands. He stressed that every German should fight the Russians and Allies to the utmost; otherwise, half would be killed and the other half made slaves. Goebbels was Hitler’s inventive mouthpiece.

“For the most part Germans believed this propaganda. Many willingly remained in the Volkssturm, but many of the elderly moved westward. They were desperate and afraid of capture by the Russians.”

“Why should there be a Volkssturm?”

“Because the means for getting young men into the Wehrmacht were exhausted,” Reynitz answers.

“Did Hitler give his usual anniversary speech?” I nod at Buchholz as he sits up straight.

“Yes, it was the 12th anniversary of his coming to power. Among other things he said, ‘We may have lost the battle, but not the war.’

We will arise like a phoenix out of the ashes, and final victory will be ours.”

“Hitler never gave up, did he? It seems he was still dreaming. That, or he was plain nuts. Did he still talk of winning?”

“He made no direct comment about winning,” says Buchholz. “He ordered a last stand at the Roer River. When the Allies crossed that and were moving to the Rhine River, Hitler ordered a last stand to protect the Ruhr area [Ruhr River valley] east of the Rhine.”

“What is the Ruhr area?”

“This is the largest and most important coal mining and industrial area in Germany. Here are the large cities of Essen, Dortmund, Düsseldorf, Wuppertal, and Duisburg, where factories made armaments in large quantities. Hitler said as he had before, ‘If we lose there, it is over.’”

“Why did he make such a statement?” I nod at Krieger, who is ready.

“He often did this. I think he was trying to jar his generals. When the Americans crossed the Rhine on a bridge at Remagen and helped the other Allies encircle the Ruhr area, Hitler ordered a court martial and sentence of death for the commander, a German colonel at Remagen, for not destroying that bridge.

“Hitler said little about the big loss of the Ruhr area. Instead, he ordered a new army to be built up near the Harz Mountains. He also said any German soldier who was not wounded and did not keep on fighting was a traitor. He ordered anyone who quit fighting to be hanged.”

“What about the Russians?” I ask Jonuschat. The others watch him.

“The Russians were advancing toward Berlin and Hitler ordered the city defended by imaginary divisions. When his top staff told him those divisions didn’t exist, he did not believe them.”

“Where were Hitler’s headquarters at that time?”

“Headquarters were still in the Chancellery in Berlin, since the last of December 1944,” says Jonuschat. “The offices and conference room were above ground, and there were two bunkers deep underground, one for Hitler and his top staff, the other for the rest of us. When the air-raid warning came, we all went down into the bunkers.”

“Where was your sleeping room?” I ask Reynitz, who sits up straight.

“My sleeping room was on the second floor. If the alarm sounded, I had to go to the ground level, then down the stairs to the bunker. The stairs were dangerous . . . partly destroyed by fire as a result of Russian bombing. Sometimes I was helped down the stairs, two staircases down, around 40 steps in all.

“When we were summoned to Hitler’s bunker, an SS man or adjutant had to lead us. We could not find it alone.”

“How was Hitler’s health at that time?” I nod to Krieger, who proceeds slowly.

“Hitler’s health became visibly worse in the spring of 1945. His face became red, he shuffled slowly, his hands trembled, and his head hung down. He stopped making angry monologues at the conferences every time a field general retreated rather than fighting to the last man, as Hitler had ordered. He talked less. His routine at the conferences remained the same, but he would swing from hope to despair.”

Krieger goes on: “He was attended by Dr. Theo Morrell, who was usually at headquarters. We thought he was giving Hitler too many

drugs. Once Dr. Morrell came to my room when I was sick in bed with influenza. He injected me with a syringe that I thought was big enough for a horse. Since that time I have been allergic to sulfanilamide. He said he was the inventor of the drug and owner of a factory in Germany that produced great quantities, and that he had another factory in Romania.”

“Did Hitler complain about his health?” I ask Krieger while he is still on that subject.

“Hitler did not complain about his health, only about never having any pleasure. Once in a while, before that time, the headquarters would be moved to his favorite place, his home, called Berghof, at Berchtesgaden, for a change. There he would see his favorites: Eva Braun and his dog, Blondi. The dog was always with him there.”

“What did Hitler think of the people of his inner circle?” I nod to Jonuschat. He stands to stretch his legs.

“Hitler talked about Rudolf Hess in a fond way, but when he recalled Hess parachuting into Scotland, in 1941, Hitler said, ‘He must have gone mad.’ He mentioned favorably Albert Speer, his minister of armaments. Speer came to headquarters occasionally, but only when summoned through Martin Bormann, who handled appointments and usually decided who could see Hitler. Hitler liked Speer but not as a friend. Hitler had no camaraderie with anyone.



Eva Braun

“I would call Bormann an ambitious man, a climber and opportunist. He was an obedient man, good to oversee the staff and tend to details, but he wasn’t regarded by Hitler as a friend,” Jonuschat says.

“Himmler thought like Hitler and was a good man to do his dirty work, like running the concentration camps and exterminating the Jews, as I learned later. Goebbels was another who thought like Hitler and was completely loyal. He stayed with Hitler to the last. The two were close but not friendly. Goering had been a top leader before the war. As the reversals came during the war, Hitler thought less of Goering, and one could not call him a friend.” Jonuschat sits down.

“What about the American announcement of unconditional surrender?” I ask Reynitz. The others watch him intently.

“If the Allied demand for unconditional surrender was intended to convince Germans to lay down their arms and quit, it was a flop. The population felt it was a fight to the finish, so most were determined to work and fight harder, as they had nothing to lose. I learned this from talking with my colleagues and other civilian employees at headquarters, including the typists, who had talked with their neighbors and friends while on leave or had received letters from them, as I did.”

Reynitz continues: “In early March 1945, Hitler had a private conference with Speer, which I recorded at Hitler’s request. It concerned concentration camps threatened to be overrun by enemy troops. I remember the main points. They discussed that steps must be taken. With no ration cards, the prisoners would run loose and loot for food and clothing. They would get guns and start shooting. Besides they would be witnesses against us.

“Hitler said, ‘If a camp is threatened, clear it out.’ Speer said, ‘We do not have enough trucks to do that.’ Hitler said, ‘Then march every-

one out. If that doesn't work, kill the prisoners and bury them," Reynitz recalls.

"Did Speer talk again with Hitler?"

"Yes, but on a different subject," Reynitz answers. "At a conference later in March, Speer contradicted Hitler. Hitler had announced his order for destruction of industrial communications, transportation, and production facilities threatened to be captured by the enemy. Speer said, 'It's no use to destroy everything the population would need to start a new life.' Hitler said angrily, 'Our people are losing the war. They don't deserve to survive. The strongest Germans died fighting, and only the weak remain. The Russians are stronger and deserve to win.' Speer still contradicted Hitler. He was ordered to submit a written memorandum."

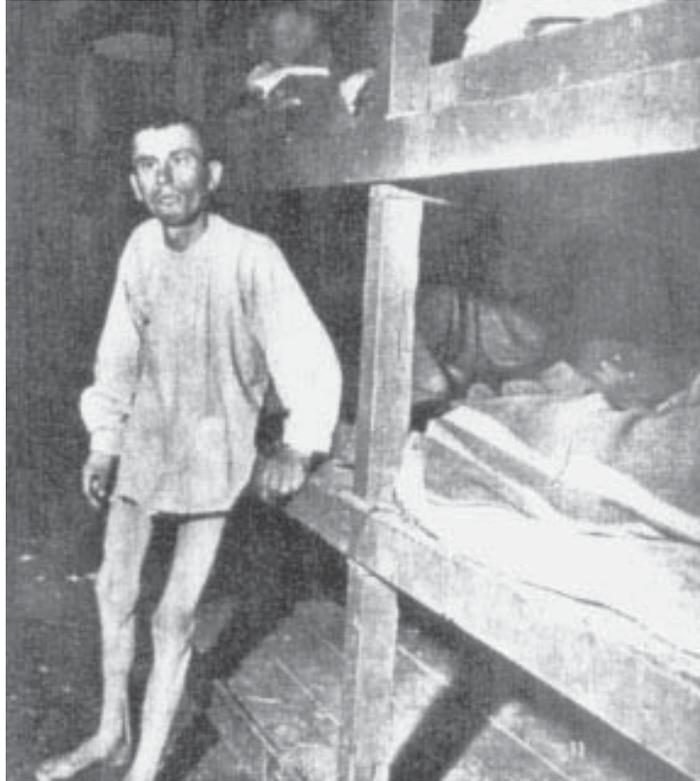
"Did Speer submit a memorandum to Hitler?" I continue with Reynitz, who is always alert.

"A few days later there was again a private meeting between the two of them, and I recorded it. Hitler read the memorandum, which I understood from their conversation said the Annihilation Order—we called it the 'Nero Order'—was wrong and that Hitler should seek a political end to the war. Hitler was angry. He said, 'Can't you insert a sentence stating that there is still hope?' Speer said that was impossible. Hitler dismissed him as minister of armaments. Speer then left."

"What about Field Marshal Jodl?" I ask Thoet. Jodl was an important player, and I wanted to know more about him.

"At a military situation conference in April 1945, it was reported that Allied troops were advancing toward Buchenwald. General Jodl didn't know what that was. An SS officer at the conference explained to him it was a concentration camp.

Witness to Barbarism



Prisoners found at Buchenwald, too weak to walk.

“Just before I left the headquarters, General Jodl said at a conference that with such a small corridor between the Russians and the Allies left for escape, it would be better to go to the Alps. Hitler ordered many generals to go to Berchtesgaden. He ordered the staff there too. I left with some others on April 20, 1945, which happened to be Hitler’s 56th birthday.”

“Had Hitler made up his mind on what to do?” I nod to Thoet.

“Hitler had not made up his mind whether to continue the war from the Alps or to stay in Berlin to the last. He was still saying, ‘When the Russians and Americans meet, the Americans will join us in fighting the Russians. If not, they will fight themselves to exhaustion. Then we can move in from the Alps and victory will be ours.’”

Witness to Barbarism

“What were the conditions when you left Berlin?” I ask Reynitz.

“I was afraid I would be sent to combat with the Volkssturm. But I was more afraid of being shot because I knew too much. The evening before I left, I went to the railway station. I wanted to try to get on the train to reach my family, to see whether they were still alive. I came to the station just as the train was going out. The next evening I was lucky to be flown to Berchtesgaden. There was no way to reach my family. The Russians were about to encircle Berlin.”

Then I recall: “On April 26, three days before the rapid advance of American troops, the SS ordered evacuation of the Dachau camp. Thousands of prisoners were forced to walk south toward Bavaria in an effort to carry out Himmler’s order [according to the trial record] that no prisoners be allowed to fall into the hands of the enemy alive.”

The room is very quiet for a moment

“We’ll stop here. It’s getting late.”

And the five recorders put on their coats and leave.

Below, the conference room at Hitler's Berghof, near Berchtesgaden; right, SS chief Heinrich Himmler.

