



NICOLAUS VON BELOW was but an obscure colonel and is probably unknown to most people today; nonetheless, he was at Hitler's side at significant moments. He took down Hitler's speech to the German people at the outbreak of WW2 in September 1939; he was with Hitler when he received the news of Hess' flight to Scotland, and when the last signal arrived from battleship Bismarck.

He tried to talk Dr. Todt from flying out of Rastenburg before the crash that made Speer Minister of Armaments, and was in the conference room with his Führer when Stauffenberg's bomb went off. In closest proximity to Hitler, he witnessed the rise and fall of Nazi Germany; triumph in Poland and France; the British humiliation at Dunkirk - all the victorious years.

Then Stalingrad¹; battle of Kursk; the toppling of Mussolini; decline of the Luftwaffe; the Allied air superiority; the Invasion; the crumbling German fronts and the unstoppable advance of the enemy. He signed Hitler's wedding certificate in the Führerbunker and was the last man out before Hitler's suicide. On so many occasions he was the proverbial 'fly-on-the-wall' ...

Early years

GEORG LUDWIG HEINRICH NICOLAUS FREIHERR VON BELOW was born on September 20, 1907, at the estate of Jargelin near Anklam in the Province of Pomerania and thus into the aristocracy. His father was Günther von Below, a Colonel in the Prussian Army, married to Mathilde, a distant cousin. No further information as to his parents, his childhood and youth is offered in his memoir.



A young Below. Photo probably colorized. Unknown source.

Having achieved a pilot's license in 1929² with the Deutsche Verkehrsfliegerschule [German Air Transport School], and with a brief career as an infantry officer cadet in the 12th Infantry of the Reichsheer, he joined the [then still clandestine] Luftwaffe in 1933³ and trained as a fighter pilot, first at the secret German base of Lipetz on Russian soil, later with different squadrons. His commanding officer in one of those, Jagdgeschwader 132 'Richthofen', was Robert Ritter von Greim, then a major.

Their paths would cross again in the closing days of the war as Below, on Hitler's order, summoned von Greim to the Führerbunker in late April 1945 so that he could be appointed C-in-C of the (remnants of) the Luftwaffe with the rank of Generalfeldmarschal⁴. Von Below also saw the couple off a few days later as they left the Bunker to fly to Grand Admiral Dönitz in

Plön with Hitler's expressed orders to arrest Heinrich Himmler who – in the Führer's view – had committed High Treason by contacting the Western Allied to negotiate peace.

Personal life

Details of von Below's personal life are virtually non-existent. He offers little in his memoir except a photo of his wife at the Berghof, mentioning that she became best friends with Eva Braun. What we do know is this; Below married Tilla Maria Kühne from Gut Niederhagen on June 26, 1937. She was born on December 12, 1918 in Magdeburg as daughter of Stephan Kühne and Barbara Bennecke and died on August 20, 1999 in Göttingen. Consequently, she outlived her husband with some twelve years.

The couple had one son and three daughters, but next to nothing is known about them. Several photos in Below's memoir are courtesy of one Dirk von Below, and that is probably the son; Claus-Dirk von Below, born 22 June, 1939 in Berlin. No information of the daughters.

Von Below also let the reader know that he had a short holiday in Prague with his wife in May/June 1943; they went to the opera and admired the architecture in the old part of the city and then went to Vienna, where they were met by Baldur von Schirach at the station; *“After sightseeing we saw a presentation of ‘The Merchant of Venice’ and then in a restaurant where we discussed the military situation (!)”*

Sounds like Ms. Below had lots of fun that evening...

“He thanked her frequently for having forged such a good friendship with Eva Braun.”

Early in von Below's service with Hitler, the Führer discovered that his Luftwaffe adjutant shared his love of music. That fact spurred Hitler's interest for him and undoubtedly furthered his career. Von Below writes;

“On 27 July [1937] Hitler invited us to be his guests at Bayreuth. From the ‘Prince’s Gallery’, his large, private box, we watched Siegfried and Götterdämmerung. After supper Brückner⁵ took my wife by the arm and presented her to Frau Wagner and Hitler, who kissed her hand. From the on we belonged to his private circle.”



Tilla Maria managed to establish a close friendship with Eva Braun, Hitler's companion through many years. The Belows' were frequent guests at the Berghof and counted among the 'Bergvolk' [Mountain People], here together with Albert Speer on the terrace, probably photographed by Eva Braun. The Belows' also formed an apparently close friendship with the Speers, but Nicolaus [allegedly, his wife shortened that to 'Klaus'], does not mention that in his memoir.

Tilla Maria seems to have been a fresh and outgoing person. Traudl Junge recalls the first time she saw Eva and her together:

“She [Eva Braun] was addressed ‘gnädiges Fräulein’ [by the staff] and the ladies called her Fräulein Braun. Frau Brandt⁶ and Frau von Below seemed to be very friendly with her, and she immediately began a very feminine, natural conversation with them about their children, the latest fashions, dogs and anecdotes of personal experiences.”

Gitta Sereny, in 'Speer, his battle with truth', provides another glimpse Maria: *Below's wife, Maria, stayed with him at the Berghof from February until Hitler went back to Rastenburg in mid-July, and most evenings Hitler, taking their arms, would take her and Margret Speer in to dinner. Eva Braun, taking Speer's arm, or in his absence Bormann's (whom she was said to detest), would always sit on Hitler's left, the other two alternately on his right.*

“He was actually very good at conversation,” Maria von Below told me. “How shall I put it and not be misunderstood? He was very warm, very personal. It is true – though I only realized this later – there wasn't much variety in his personal conversation with us. With me, or Margret Speer or Anni Brandt, he would ask about the children, be quite interested, I thought, in little stories about them, respond with laughter or understanding nods. In my case he often asked me how things were going for my parents who were running their largish estate. I remember once, without meaning to complain or anything, I said they were running short of oil. Later that night, without telling me, he told Bormann to get some supplies to them. He was thoughtful that way.”

[Sereny, p. 435]

Throughout his memoir, Below concentrates on the conduct of the war in the various theaters; visits by foreign Heads of State; meetings and conferences; technical aspects of war production and testing of new types of armament etc.

He thus focus on his position as Luftwaffe adjutant, and makes very little room for his social and private life. 'All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy', the saying goes, and perhaps he simply was one. At least he seems to have been a very devoted and serious no-nonsense type of person, putting his service with Hitler above all other considerations.

The Faithful Luftwaffe Adjutant

At the behest of Hermann Göring, Below became Adolf Hitler's Luftwaffe adjutant in 1937, a position he retained throughout the war. He was well-liked by his Führer, a remarkable feat as Hitler generally disliked officers of aristocratic background. This sentiment grew in strength with the ever more suspicious dictator as the tide of war changed in Germany's disfavor. Hitler had many brawls with his generals, culminating with the aftermath of the July 20, 1944 assassination attempt, but Below, with the modest rank of colonel, was one of the few aristocratic members of Hitler's entourage to serve him in a close capacity right till the end in Berlin.⁷



'Family photo' at Wolfsschanze 1940. Von Below in the company of his Führer and a bunch of Nazi bigwigs, counting, left to right; SA-Obergruppenführer Wilhelm Brückner, OKH-Adjutant Major Engel, Reichspressechef Dr. Otto Dietrich, Hitlers Begleitarzt Dr. Karl Brandt, Chef des OKW Generaloberst Wilhelm Keitel, Luftwaffenadjutant Generalmajor [Karl] Bodenschatz, Adolf Hitler, Wehrmachtsadjutant Oberst Rudolf Schmundt, SS-Adjutant SS-Gruppenführer Julius Schaub, Chef des Wehrmachtsführungsamtes im OKW General Alfred Jodl, Adjutant Himmler und Verbindungsmann zu Hitlers SS-Gruppenführer Karl Wolff, Leiter der Parteikanzlei Reichsleiter Martin Bormann, Hitlers Leibarzt Prof. Dr. [Theo] Morell, Luftwaffenadjutant Hauptmann von Below, Reichsbilderstatter der NSDAP Heinrich Hoffmann. [Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-R99057]

THE POSITION AS THE FÜHRERS ADJUTANT required von Below to travel extensively in Hitler's company; between the various headquarters in the East and in the West as well as to conferences in Germany and in German occupied territory, and Below met most of the pro-Axis leaders such as Italy's Mussolini; Romania's Antonescu; Hungary's Horthy; Norway's Quisling; Japan's Oshima and King Boris of Bulgaria.

Below's memoir – written on the basis of his adjutants' diary⁸ – thus contribute to shed light on momentous events as seen from within the Nazi court. Von Below had Hitler's ear in many important matters and he faithfully served his liege lord through thick and thin.

"Over the years I had the opportunity to recommend to Hitler a number of able frontline officers without General Staff training. These included Hube and Rommel, whom I knew from my infantry training days between 1929 and 1933. Both fulfilled Hitler's expectations of them."

Below was also well-liked by the other members of Hitler's entourage who viewed him as a pleasant, soft spoken man, and formed lasting friendships with several of them.



A not too often seen photo, allegedly taken by Walter Frenz, at von Below's 35th birthday in September 1942 when the war was still going well for Germany and the disaster at Stalingrad had not yet materialized. The birthday child sitting at the far left between secretaries Johanna Wolf and Christa Schröder, next is Dr. Karl Brandt and Walter Hewel, liaison officer to Ribbentrop, followed by Albert Bormann [brother to Martin] and Hitler's long-time adjutant Julius Schaub. According to Below, the party relished in Hitler's gift to him; a one-kilo tin of Russian caviar. In 1943, his birthday would coincide with Operation Gomorrah [24.7-30.7]; the Allied bombing of Hamburg where the resulting firestorm would kill more than 40.000 German.

Von Below had Hitler's ear in many connections, also when it came to technical stuff which interested him profoundly and an area he, in Below's estimation and contrary to Hermann Göring, grasped rather quickly;

"Just before Christmas 1938 my wife and I attended the Paris International Aircraft Exhibition, where amongst others the British Spitfire was on display and attracted a great deal of interest. It was in an unfinished state, so we gained only an outward impression. It resembled the Me 109. As I knew the flying qualities of the latter I could see the Spitfire would probably be equal. No engine was fitted, but we heard rumours.

Hitler listened attentively to my report. I stated frankly that we had to reckon with the British fighter being superior because the British built better engines. In the end it probably came down to the design. Hitler decided that he had no time to lose.

At the RLM⁹ I explained my impressions to Jeschonnek¹⁰ and their effect on Hitler. Göring was not interested in my report. I assumed he knew everything worth knowing from Udet.¹¹ Later I discovered he knew nothing."

AS LIAISON OFFICER TO GÖRING, 'second man in the Reich' and Luftwaffe C-in-C, Below found himself amidst many an intrigue at high-court - and in the process he gradually formed a low opinion of the Reichsmarshal. He found Göring lazy, technically inept, limited in his visions for the development of the Luftwaffe and prone to blame everybody else for his own shortcomings; a view Hitler eventually came to share. As the Allied air war over Germany intensified, and the once so mighty Luftwaffe was powerless to stop the enemy,

Hitler repeatedly flew into a rage. Von Below recounts how the raids on November 22/23, 1943, wrought havoc on central Berlin and how Hitler, at a display of new aircraft models the following week, bitterly reproached the Luftwaffe brass-hats, including Göring, for their incompetence.

Others from Hitler's entourage witnessed the wrath of their Master too;

"I remember one daylight raid over Munich [1944]. Hitler wanted to know exactly what forces were being used in defense, and Colonel von Below was on the phone all the time, getting news. Finally, he had to report: 'My Führer, it was planned for six German fighters to take off, but three never got off the ground, two had to turn back because of engine trouble, and the last plane felt so isolated that it didn't attack.'"¹² Hitler was furious. Although his guests were with him he couldn't help ranting and raging at the German Luftwaffe."

[Traudl Junge, , p. 121]

Being the link between Göring and Hitler was thus no easy task, but Below himself never became the focus of the Führer's temper, even as the Allied bombing gradually pulverized German industry and the Luftwaffe was increasingly hapless in its defense of the Motherland.



Hanna Reitsch receives her Iron Cross, Second Class, in March 1941 from Hitler personally, with Below and sly Hermann Göring watching. She would receive the First Class cross at the Berghof on February 28, 1944, on which occasion she argued strongly for the creation of a 'suicide squad', 'Kamikaze-style' in the Luftwaffe. Hitler opposed the thought of self-sacrifice among German pilots but eventually - and grudgingly - gave his consent that preparations for such a program could be initiated. Photo: Bundesarchiv.

"The following day [March 28], Hitler received me in the Reich Chancellery to confer on me the Iron Cross II. His Adjutant led me through a long corridor to the room where Hitler, Göring and one or two other people were assembled. This was the second time I had been presented to Hitler, the first occasion being in 1937, when the honorary title 'Flugkapitän' had been conferred on me.

Hitler greeted me with friendly warmth, while Göring stood beside him, beaming like a father permitted to introduce a pretty mannered child. Then I was invited to seat myself between them at a large, round table, on which, as I vividly remember, there stood a vase of early sweet peas. Hitler questioned me at length about my test flights, particularly those connected with experiments on dive breaks. He was also interested in the experimental work done on the cutting of barrage-balloon cables. His knowledge of technical aeronautics, reflected in the searching pointedness of his questions, struck me as remarkable for a layman."

[Reitsch, p. 202]

Since May 22, 1944, Below was also Albert Speer's liaison officer at the Hitler court and the person Speer entrusted to bring Hitler his grave memorandum in March 1945, where he predicted the collapse of the Reich within weeks.

“In these three months, March to May 1944, I had many conversations with Hitler, who began to confide me thoughts which until the he had kept in private.”

At the time of the miscarried bomb attack at the Wolfsschanze in Rastenburg on July 20, 1944, Below was in the conference room with Hitler when the bomb went off [and thus exempted himself from any suspicion]. He sustained a concussion¹³ and light injuries and describes the incident graphically in his memoir, noting how Hitler afterwards was a man strengthened in his belief of being protected by divine providence.



Nicolaus von Below [extreme left] for once not in uniform, with Speer and Hitler at Obersalzberg in happier times, inspecting some of Speer's handiwork; likely plans for remodeling Linz or some other German town.

However, Below also claim that Hitler some time after, in December, in a late-night one-on-one conversation, acknowledged that the war was lost:

“Even Hitler could not close his mind to this [failure of the Ardennes Offensive]. One late evening I was with him in the air raid bunker. He appeared to me to be in despair. Never before or subsequently did I see him in such a state. He spoke of taking his life, for the last hope of achieving victory had gone. He reproached the Luftwaffe and the ‘traitors’ in the Army. He said something like;

‘I know the war is lost. The enemy superiority is too great. I have been betrayed. After 20 July everything came out, things I had considered impossible. It was precisely those circles against me who had profited most from National Socialism. I pampered and decorated them. And that was all the thanks I got. I ought to put a bullet in my head. I lacked hard fighters. Model and Dietrich are such. And Rudel. Now there’s a successor for me. Intelligent. What are his views on art and culture? He should come.’ He continued: ‘We will not capitulate, ever. We may go down. But we will take the world down with us.’”

I have never forgotten his words. I have never spoken to anybody about this conversation until now. It made it finally clear to me that Hitler would never

seek to negotiate peace and would rather drag everyone down in his defeat. The path had been laid: it led to that very unconditional surrender upon which the victors were insisting.”

**“Hitler gave me a cyanide capsule
in case I encountered a difficult situation with no way out.
I put the poison away safely.”**

Three quarters of a year later, Below followed his sovereign into the Führerbunker under the Reichskanzlei in Berlin and stayed there during the Russian onslaught. He was in the Bunker at the arrival and subsequent departure of Ritter von Greim and Hanna Reitsch¹⁴ and witnessed the fate of Hermann Fegelein.¹⁵ He was the intended recipient and bearer of Göring’s fatal succession-telex to Hitler [but Bormann managed to intercept it and blow it out of proportions], that cost the Reichsmarshal his job, his titles and decorations and, by a whisker, his life.¹⁶

BELOW ATTENDED THE LAST PERFORMANCE of the Berlin Philharmonic on 12 April 1945 in the company of Speer (and was likely in the know of Speer’s clandestine plan, although he doesn’t mention it)¹⁷, before the city was captured by the Red Army and later commented in this memoir that the concert had “...taken the audience back to another (better?) world”.

That same evening US President Roosevelt died and the news briefly brought wild, new hopes to the Bunker inmates; old horoscopes predicting the renewed ‘House of Brandenburg Miracle’¹⁸ were dug out and Hitler relished in dreams of a last-minute reversal of the fortunes of war, but the flame quickly died out.

Escape from the Bunker

On April 29th, after the royal wedding¹⁹, Below, vexed by the prospects of dying like ‘a rat in a hole’, boldly asked Hitler for permission to try a breakout to the west. In those last days, the slightest whiff of ‘defeatism’ could be fatal and others had been shot for less, but surprisingly Hitler concurred, giving his Luftwaffe adjutant written authority for the journey and instructing him to report to Großadmiral Dönitz²⁰. Von Below took his batman with him – a man we know only as Heinz Mathiesing – and departed at midnight, just hours before Hitler’s suicide and with the Red Army virtually on the doorstep of the Chancellery.

“Hitler shook hands with him, but, as with Lorenz²¹, in silence. Von Below then said goodbye to all the others in the Bunker. General Krebs asked him to greet his wife for him, if possible, and gave him her address; he also handed him a letter to General Jodl. In this Krebs informed Jodl that the situation in Berlin was desperate; the encirclement of the city was complete, arms and ammunition were lacking, supplies dropped from the air was inadequate, it was no longer possible to land in Berlin, nothing had been heard of Wenck and relief from his army was no longer expected. Resistance in Berlin could last only a few days. The Führer expected other fronts to fight on to the last man.”

[Trevor-Roper, p. 171]

Below recalled the moment he left the Führerbunker:

“As I stepped out from the Chancellery I saw before me an absolute inferno. A confusion of cables, rubble and tram wires lay around – ruins, bomb craters and artillery craters. There was a serious fire in the Potsdamer Platz area. The whole city

was enveloped as far as one could see in a mixture of smoke and fog from the many fires crackling on all sides. I wondered what was worse – to be here under Russian bombardment or awaiting death in the Bunker. We headed north along the Herman Göring Strasse to the Brandenburg Gate, bore left towards the Zoo, along the East-West Axis, past the Victory Column to the railway embankment, made another left turn and after a few steps reached the large municipal air raid shelter.

On this walk through the burning and mostly destroyed city I felt an enormous relief. With every step it became clearer to me that I had nothing left to do. It was all the same to me whatever happened now. I was free at last of all the responsibility and depressing burden of the Hitler years.”

Somehow they managed to sift through the enemy cordon – Below does not go into detail in his memoir - and with the help of a group from the Hitlerjugend they crossed the Havel River, finding civilian clothes with a farmer. They never made it to Plön and Dömitz as ordered [nor did they attempt to], but, registering under false names with the western authorities and surviving on odd jobs, they gradually worked their way through devastated Germany until parting in June. Here, Mathiesing vanished from history while von Below now headed for home and managed to reunite with his three children and pregnant wife.²²

Capture and imprisonment

At the birth of his fourth child, Christa, in July 1945, he was recognized at the maternity clinic and forced to flee. He found shelter with friends in Bonn and started studying economics at the University there, but in early 1946 he was recognized and denounced, subsequently being arrested by the Britons. His special position with Hitler required him to witness at the Nuremberg trials and, albeit no charges were ever raised against him personally, he was held in custody until eventually discharged in May 1948. What he did for a living thereafter is unclear, but it would appear, that he did not resume a military career.

It is known, however, that von Below postwar ‘hung out’ with a group of survivors from the ‘Bergvolk’. Frau Below did apparently not accompany her husband on this occasion. Judging from the age of the portrayed, the photo must have been taken in the late 1970ties or early 1980ties.



Photo: ‘Alte Kameraden’ at a gathering. Photo circulates on various internet platforms and in groups, but I have found no dating or additional information as to the whereabouts.

Von Below wrote his memoir; 'At Hitler's side', shortly after the war but it was not published in Germany until 1980²³. During the fuss in connection with the (faked) 'Hitler Diaries', obtained and published by the weekly 'Stern' in 1982-83, Below, well aware that the Führer never kept a diary, publicly expressed his sincere doubts as to the authenticity of the books.

As an adjutant, there had been little chance to win honor and glory on the battlefield, but Below was the holder of the exclusive Pilot/Observer Badge in Gold with Diamonds, a rare medal shared with few others (these included Galland, Rudel, Hartmann and Hans-Joachim Marseille) and the Wound Badge. Nicolaus von Below died on 24.7.1983 in Detmold, Nordrhein-Westfalen, 76 years of age. His resting place is registered as 'non cemetery – somewhere in Germany'. Tilla Maria von Below died in 1999 in Göttingen, at the age of 81.

**"I am not a member of that choir
which now condemns vociferously
what once they so admired..."**

NICOLAUS VON BELOW probably never really lost his admiration for Adolf Hitler or actively denounced the Third Reich and the atrocities that took place during its twelve years of reign, as did i.e. Traudl Junge. Like so many of his compatriots, who had not directly been involved in war crimes or crimes against humanity, he seemed to believe that he had no part in what had transpired.

In his memoir, he dedicates one and a quarter of a page to a chapter named 'The Final Solution' and in this he flatly denies any knowledge of the atrocities in the East, the transport of Jews to the camps or the Holocaust in general. In his own words, he and his family lived 'in a certain isolation', and some themes were simply taboo. The Gestapo saw to that this unspoken rule was adhered to.

Below's book is probably a unique document in that it represents a serious attempt, by a comparatively uncomplicated but unfailingly sincere man, to come to terms with matters he would ordinarily have considered totally beyond him. Maria, as despairingly loyal to the memory of Hitler she knew her husband had been, told me that both of them were absolutely devastated when they learned from the Nuremberg trial what had been done in their names.

[Sereny, p. 112]

Whatever one may think of this, Below's memoir sheds light on many events within the Third Reich and is a valuable, factual eyewitness account. Thus, a recommendable read.

Recommended reading

Baur, Hans: '**I was Hitler's Pilot**'. © 2013, Frontline

Below, Nicolaus von: '**At Hitler's side**'. © 2001, Greenhill

Junge, Traudl: '**Until the Final Hour**'. © 2005, Phoenix

O'Donnell, James P.: '**The Bunker**'. © 1978, Da Capo

Reitsch, Hanna: '**The Sky, My Kingdom**'. © 2009, Casemate

Sereny, Gitta: '**Speer, his battle with truth**'. © 1996, Picador

Trevor-Roper, Hugh: '**The Last Days of Hitler**'. © 1995, Pan Books

Notes

-
- ¹ The encirclement and later annihilation of the 6th Army at Stalingrad in the winter of 42/43 made the deepest impression on him. His brother was an officer in Paulus' staff and did not make it out from the cauldron.
- ² Below's initial training as a fighter pilot took place in Lipezk, near Voronezh in the Soviet Union. In those days, the relationship with the Russians was still good, and the infant Luftwaffe was a clandestine operation, hidden from the overseers of the Versailles Treaty.
- ³ Luftwaffe's existence was publicly acknowledged on 26 February 1935, just over two weeks before open defiance of the Versailles Treaty through German re-armament and conscription would be announced on 16 March [Wikipedia]
- ⁴ This episode that includes famous aviatrix Hanna Reitsch is described in the facebook Note 'Flights into Hell' and will also be rewritten in this format at a later time.
- ⁵ Wilhelm Brückner, SA Obergruppenführer, Hitler's Chief ADC, participant in the Bierhalle Putsch in 1923 and an old crony from the fighting days.
- ⁶ Anni Brandt, wife of Dr. Karl Brandt, for a period Hitler's personal surgeon. Deeply involved in the T4 euthanasia program. Charged and convicted to death in Nuremberg. Hanged in Landsberg Prison, June 2, 1948.
- ⁷ During his long service von Below on several occasions asked for transfer to active fighter pilot duty, but this was always rebuffed by Hitler. As a sort of consolation he kept up with technical developments in aviation and frequently honed his flying skills, flying everything from Fieseler Storchs to the jet-propelled Me 262
- ⁸ Below lost the diary during the final days of the war, but during his almost three years of British captivity, he was able to recreate most of it.
- ⁹ Reichs Luftfahrt Ministerium [Air Ministry]
- ¹⁰ Hans Jeschonnek, Generaloberst and Chief of Luftwaffe Operational Staff. Committed suicide on August 18, 1943, haven been made the scapegoat for Göring's ineptitude and the failure of the Luftwaffe to defend Germany.
- ¹¹ Ernst Udet, WW1 flying ace who, through his friendship with Göring, was appointed in charge of research and development for the Luftwaffe. Gravely in over his head and heavily alcoholized, he failed miserably. Committed suicide on November 17, 1941.
- ¹² Traudl Junge must be referring to the April 24/25 attack by the USSAF. More than 700 heavy B17 bombers were escorted by some 800 fighters. In view of those odds, the sole German pilot's lack of lust to engage seems reasonable.
- ¹³ This ailment would later – in August – make him bedridden for three whole weeks.
- ¹⁴ Once again - just for the record since the myth seems to surface every now and then; Hanna Reitsch was undoubtedly a skilled and competent pilot, but she *did not* fly Greim in and out of Berlin. On the flight in, Greim was piloting the Fiesler Storch, and Hanna took the controls and landed the machine only after Greim was wounded and lost consciousness. On the way out, the Arado 96 that was used was piloted by one Luftwaffe Feldwebel, known to history only as 'B'. See Note: 'Flights into Hell'
- ¹⁵ As we recall, Fegelein absented himself on April 26 and took refuge in his Bleibtreustrasse apartment from where he was retrieved by RSD officers. After a summary 'trial', he was demoted and shot somewhere outside the Bunker.
- ¹⁶ Little of what transpired at the Hitler Court escaped the Argus-eyed Bormann. Göring, who was well aware of Bormann's skill for Machiavellian machinations had urged Below to see that the telegram was 'properly delivered', but Bormann intercepted the telegram and presented it to Hitler as an attempted coup d'état.
- ¹⁷ The concert was meant by Speer to be the last in the sense that he would whisk the orchestra out of Berlin in buses in order to prevent them from being adopted into the 'Volkssturm' as planned by Göbbels. In the end, the idea miscarried as all but one of the members chose to stay.
- ¹⁸ During the 'Seven Years War', 1756-1763, Frederick II of Prussia was squeezed between two of his adversaries Austria and Russia and faced defeat. In January 1762, however, the

Tsarina Elizabeth unexpectedly died and her successor shifted to an alliance with Prussia. Hitler hoped that a similar turn of events could be the result of Roosevelt's death.

¹⁹ Von Below was present at the wedding between Hitler and Eva Braun and the subsequent 'celebration' and he co-signed Hitler's personal testament as witness along with Göbbels and Bormann. "It was a rather eerie situation" as he puts it.

²⁰ In several historians accounts – and in Wikipedia - it is surmised that von Below carried secret orders to Generalfeldmarshal Keitel, also resident in Plön. This bogus assumption stems – Below admit this in his memoir – from a little private revenge he took on his British interrogators. Vexed by the treatment they gave him, he invented the story from scratch and had the pleasure to see first Hugh Trevor-Roper take the bait; hook, line and sinker, later other historians followed. The story even appears in Ian Kershaw's 2008 authoritative 'Hitler, a biography'. [p. 952]

²¹ Heinz Lorenz, Göbbels' deputy, who – along with other officers – had been tasked with bringing the Führer's testament (and Göbbels' addendum) out of Berlin the day before.

²² Strangely, Hitlers personal pilot, Hans Baur, in his memoir claims that von Below was sent to General Wenck, allegedly by plane, 'with various instructions' on April 29, and that he, Baur, thereafter assumed the position as Luftwaffe adjutant to Hitler. I have found no cooperating evidence for that claim. [I was Hitlers pilot, p. 182-83]

²³ Allegedly, the English version [2001] is only half the length of the original German (which I haven't yet read). Below has been rightfully accused of being very positive to Hitler and to omit other character portraits one might expect ['The reader catches glimpses of Hermann Göring, Erhard Milch, and a few others, but Hitler occupies center stage and others remain in the shadows.']. As with other from Hitler's entourage, Below claims ignorance in relation to the Holocaust and his is prone to gloss-over events that does not fit into his picture, i.e. treatment of slave labor [p. 227]. Nonetheless, his memoir is an important first-hand account for anyone interested in World War Two, the Hitler Court and Nazi Germany.