

## Breakout by the Reichs Chancellery Group

Close to midnight on May 1, a large party, perhaps as many as seven or eight hundred, assembled in the Chancellery underground garages where the shiny limos of the motorpool were parked.<sup>1</sup> They were all inhabitants of the Citadel; bunker dwellers that had lived like moles deep underground for at least a fortnight, pinning their feeble hopes on a rescue force that never materialized.<sup>2</sup> The suicides of Hitler, the Moloch, & his spouse, Eva, shortly followed by that of Goebbels, the Nazi High Priest, and his wife broke the spell that had kept their entourage in a limbo for so long. Released from all oaths of allegiance and with an unrelenting foe at the doorstep, it had become time for the remaining paladins to depart. A bold dash towards the west before the harbingers of another, oppressive regime descended upon them seemed the only hope left.



SS-Brigadeführer Wilhelm Mohnke, commander of the Citadel, had coordinated the breakout with General Helmuth Weidling, overall commander of the Berlin garrison. Now he tried to organize chaos by splitting the war party up into smaller groups of various sizes, who were to depart at ten minute intervals. Under the agreement with Weidling, they had about ten hours before he would surrender the garrison to the Russians in the morning of May 2.

The plan was for each group to use the U-Bahn tunnels to escape undetected from the Chancellery; proceed under the Spree and as far north as possible, preferably behind the Soviet rear lines before reuniting. The rally point was the Stettiner Bahnhof [Nordbahnhof] from where they were to march in unison to the Humboldthain Flaktower before splitting up again, leaving each group to find a way to connect with the main German forces under Großadmiral Dönitz in the north and west of Germany.

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**AT LEAST THIS WAS THE STORY** Mohnke told James P. O'Donnell and the one he relayed in his 1978 book; 'The Bunker'. There just might have been another agenda, known only to Mohnke and the - at this point - deceased Führer.<sup>3</sup>

# The groups

Up to ten groups (Mohnke said seven during his interrogation in Russia, The 'Hitler Book' mention six groups) took off from the Reichs Chancellery in the night of May 1. There is little information about who were in what group, but this is what I have been able to retrieve so far.<sup>4</sup>

## Group 1 consisted of (known<sup>5</sup>):

1. *Mohnke, Wilhelm*, SS Brigadeführer, Commander of the Citadel
2. *Klingemeyer, Arthur*, SS Sturmbannführer, Second-in-command of Kampfgruppe Mohnke
3. *Günsche, Otto*, SS Obersturmbannführer, Adjutant to Hitler
4. *Voss, Hans-Erich*, Vizeadmiral, liaison officer to Grand Admiral Dönitz
5. *Schenck, Ernst Günther*, SS Obersturmbannführer, Physician
6. *Junge, Traudl*, Secretary to Hitler
7. *Christian, Gerda*, Secretary to Hitler
8. *Krüger, Else*, Secretary to Bormann
9. *Manziarly, Constance*, Hitler's dietician
10. *Hewel, Walter*, Diplomat, liaison officer to Foreign Minister Ribbentrop
11. *Dose* [first name unknown], Obersturmführer [with a detachment of the Begleitskompanie]

Reliable information regarding group composition is scarce and can only be retrieved from memoirs or interviews given by the surviving members of the breakout groups.

It is not known how many men the 'detachment' of combat troops under Obersturmbannführer Dose counted, but as Mohnke's philosophy was that no group should exceed twenty people, it was likely a 'Zug' of ten soldiers.

**Note:** As no (known) footage from the breakout exists, many illustrations here are courtesy of Oliver Hirschbiegels outstanding 2004 film; 'Der Untergang'. Others are found on the Internet.



**MOHNKE ASSIGNED HIMSELF** as the leader of the first group to break out with Otto Günsche as his adjutant. It also contained Hitler's secretaries, Gerda Christian and Traudl Junge, the cook Constanze Manziarly, Dr. Schenck and other non-combatant Bunker inhabitants. We don't know exactly why Mohnke choose to lead the first group; maybe he felt that the dangerous avant-garde reconnaissance befell on him as the Citadel commandant, or maybe the sly soldier, a veteran from several theaters of war and holder of the Knights Cross, knew that the first group would have the element of surprise on its side and thus an advantage. The fact, that he included the women in this group may be evidence of the latter.

But there might have been other, more sinister reasons to Mohnke's arrangement as implied in *Rogmann's story* at the end of the document...

# The Walk

## Group One, part 1: The breakout...

As we cannot legally and safely use the underground railway for walking, the first part of the tour must be executed the easy way. We cannot start inside the Chancellery either, as it is long gone, but we can listen to those, who were there:

*Traudl Junge: "Otto Günsche leads us through the crowds; his broad shoulders forcing a way for us four women (Frau Christian, Fräulein Krüger, Fräulein Manziarly and me) through the soldiers waiting here ready to march. Among them I see the familiar faces of Bormann, Baur, Stumpfegger, Kempka, Rattenhuber and Linge, all now wearing steel helmets. We nod to each other. Most of them I'll never see again."*

The war party assembled in the large underground garage, eerily lit by torches as in some medieval gathering. Groups were formed, Mohnke briefed them of the overall plan and Group One made its way through the maze of rooms to a cellar window nearest the Kaiserhof Station [Mohrenstrasse].<sup>6</sup>



➔ 1. Pretending you have just left the Chancellery, position yourself at the south-eastern corner of Wilhelmstrasse and Voss Strasse (outside the 'Peking Ente'), then cross Wilhelmstrasse towards the Mohrenstrasse U-Bahn entrance.

[[Mohnke's group ran swiftly, crutched, in Indian file](#)] If you want to get into the proper mood, feel free to do the same, but beware; pretty heavy traffic on Wilhelmstrasse!

➔ Once you reach the entrance, descend the stairs to the platform.



**Traudl Junge:** *“At last the Wilhelmsplatz stretches ahead, shining in the moonlight. The dead horse still lies on the paving stones, but only the remains of it now. Hungry people have come out of the U-Bahn tunnels to slice off pieces of meat ... Soundlessly, we cross the square. Sporadic shots are fired, but the gunfire is stronger further away. Then we have reached the U-Bahn tunnel outside the ruins of the Kaiserhof. We climb down and work our way in the darkness ...”*

➔ 2. On the platform, board an eastbound train (U2 Pankow) for the first leg, then get off at Stadtmitte station.

[Scores of frightened citizens crowded the platform, hiding from the fierce battle that had raged overhead for several days]

**Detail:** As you alight the U2 at Stadtmitte, take a look at the platform and tracks. In 1945, an empty carriage with smashed windows, no electric light and no phone was the headquarter for SS Brigadeführer Gustav Krukenberg, commandant of the foreign forces; Norwegians, Danes, Swedes and Latvian and French volunteers, fighting ‘against the Bolshevik hordes’ as it was termed back then.

**Dr. Günther Schenck:** *“It was at least midnight as we plodded into the next station. This was Stadtmitte, the familiar transfer station. I remembered it from my student days in the bustling Berlin of the nineteen-twenties. Here, on upper and lower levels, the tracks cross at right angles. This was our first and very welcome break in the long march. A breather for some, a cigarette break for smokers. We all clambered up like squirrels to the next platform. We had come out of the total dark again and were blinking. The scene was similar to that we had found back at the Kaiserhof station [Mohrenstrasse]. It was, however, a bit more orderly; there was more glimmering light. I soon spotted an emergency hospital, operating by candle- and gaslight in an abandoned, side-tracked yellow subway car. Several surgeons were operating, under the direction of Oberarzt Zimmermann.”*

➔ Proceed through the ‘mouse-tunnel’ to the U6 platform. Board the north going train to Alt-Tegel.

➔ 3. Get off the U6 at the Friedrichstrasse station.

[Mohnke and his group initially wanted to cross the Spree via the tunnel, but were prevented from this as the watertight bulkhead doors were closed for the night. Hence, they had to surface on the south side of the river.] While you make these short hops, try to imagine how it would be on foot, running on the tracks in pitch-dark and not knowing whether the enemy would open fire the very next minute.

➔ 4. Ascend to street level and leave the station through the exit at Friedrichstrasse. You are now some 100 meters from the southern landing of the Weidendammer Bridge.

Heavy fighting was taking place here. The Russians controlled the northern landing of the bridge and were pushing south. At the same time, German and foreign forces (The Scandinavians, Latvian and French SS) were trying to break out towards the north. For Mohnke’s group, trying to cross the river via the bridge would thus be suicide, which later arriving groups were to realize.



➔ 5. Take the route south around the station building and proceed to the footbridge running under the railroad tracks. Cross the Spree using this bridge.

[Mohnke and his team found another passage, a - miraculously unguarded - footbridge, the 'Schlütersteg', a little further west. This passage no longer exists.]

**Wilhelm Mohnke:** "Luckily, after some reconnoitering we located, just north of us and to the left, a narrow catwalk or swinging bridge. It was less than two meters wide. Passage was blocked by concertina barbed wire, but we quickly cut that away with our field pliers. My group - which had now dwindled to twelve - all scampered across on the double, for our silhouettes were casting long dancing shadows on the water below. We made most excellent moving targets, like dummies in a shooting gallery. But we all got across. No shots rang out"

➔ 6. You are now on the Schiffbauerdamm, and from here on, we will need a little imagination as the topography looks very different today.

[Mohnke now took advantage of the ruins and proceeded through basements, courtyards, gardens and devastated houses and streets, slowly and arduously making their way north till they reached the Museum of Natural History on Invalidenstrasse.] Assuming that today's proprietors and house owners probably won't fancy us crawling over fences and messing up their gardens, we will stick to the streets.

*"Group One spent almost an hour following an unmapped, winding, narrow path. This fresh path had been beaten through whole alps of rubble in a northerly direction from the Spree to the Invalidenstrasse. It led through old cellars, through walls or tenement courts, through ruined buildings where combat engineers had blasted away walls and partitions in the recent fighting. Again and again Mohnke's group stumbled on clusters of terrified civilians, huddled around lighted candles, in cellars or impromptu air-raid shelters."*

[The Bunker, p. 271]



**Detail:** It is actually possible, however, to follow the 1945 route a short way, so if you are up for a little detour, swing right immediately after the railroad overpass (at Schiffbauerdamm 12) and walk back north-east under the overpass, then swing left. Ahead of you is (was in 2012) a narrow, overgrown passageway with private gardens to the right and the elevated railroad to the left. After some 30-40 meters, the path is blocked by a fence and you will have to double back. But that little journey back in time may help to set the right mood.

➔ 7. Follow the Schiffbauerdamm west to Albrechtstrasse. Turn right and go north to Schumannstrasse. Proceed west to Luisenstrasse where you make a right and go north till you reach Invalidenstrasse. The Museum is to your right, at the northern side of the street. (Hint: It is probably possible to make a shortcut through the Charité Campus, which will be closer to Mohnke's original route. Try it out.)

**Traudl Junge:** *"For hours we crawl through cavernous cellars, burning buildings, strange, dark streets! Somewhere in abandoned cellar, we rest and sleep for a couple of hours."*

As the group is struggling forward, Mohnke observe that Russian artillery, which had all but died down, fire seems to intensify again, coming from the Tiergarten and seemingly directed towards Friedrichstrasse. What he witnessed here was the ill-fated attempt by the Nordland and Charlemagne forces to push through the Russian cordon, sporting what was left of their armor; five Tiger tanks and a host of armored vehicles. Along with this force was Group Three, hoping to travel in the wake of the panzers.<sup>7</sup>

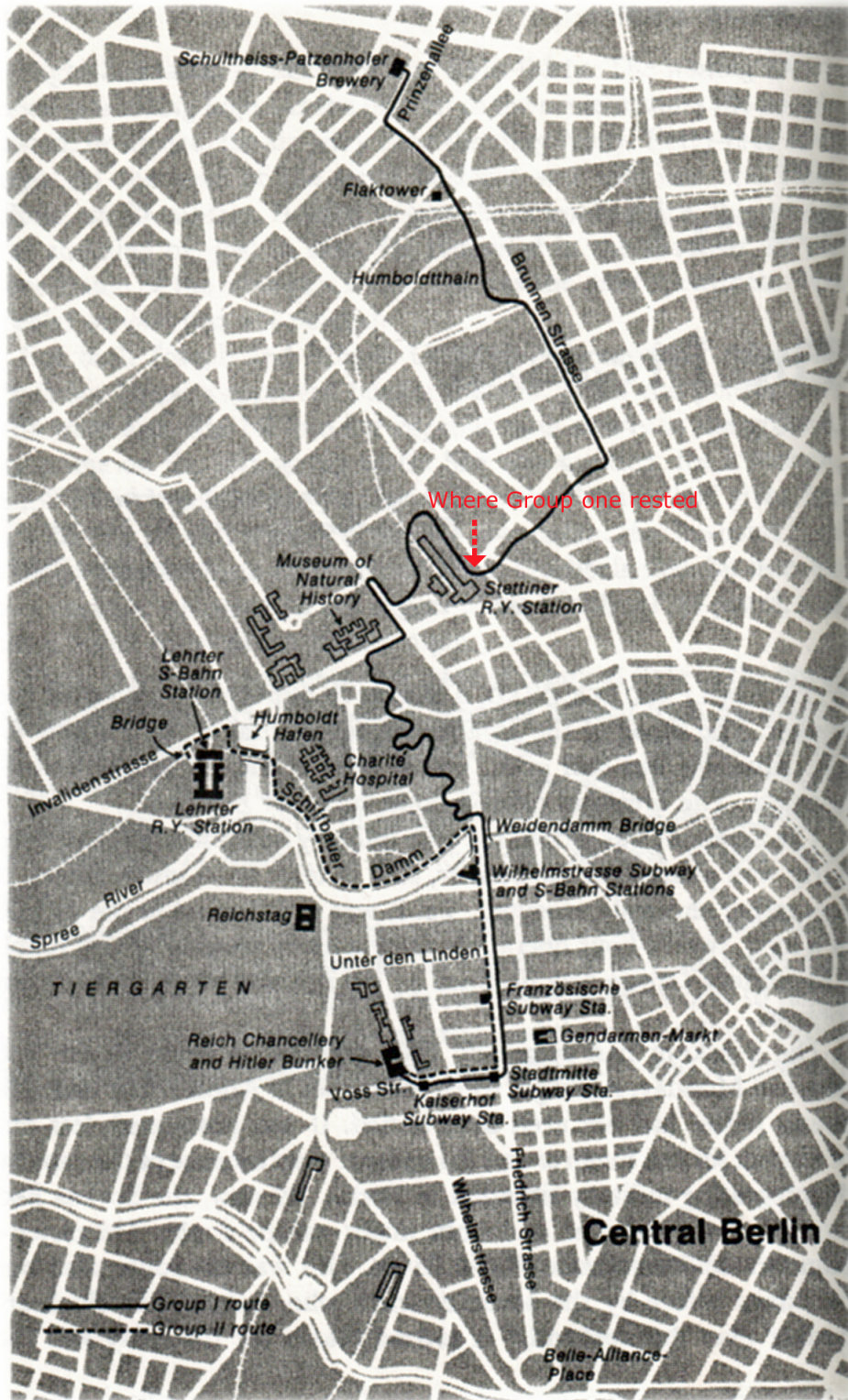
➔ Having reached the Naturkunde Museum, turn left on Chausseestrasse and walk as far as the Habersaatthstrasse on your left. Stop! On your left is a large area, today occupied by the Bundes Nachrichten Dienst (the German Intelligence Service) and stretching almost 400 meters along the Chausseestrasse.

[This is as far as the Mohnke team made it north for this first leg of their journey. In 1945 this area housed the Maikäfer Barracks. At the entrance to the barracks, a T34 tank blocked the road, its turret swiveled ominously towards the newcomers. Mohnke, having no anti-tank weapon available, made a hasty retreat.]<sup>8</sup>

Their doubling back down Chausseestrasse brought them in proximity of the fighting, and the group had to take a casualty as one stray shell fell several hundred meters short of the bridge and exploded in their midst. Major-General

Joachim Ziegler, former commander of Division Nordland and relieved from his command only five days prior, was killed instantaneously.<sup>9</sup>

➔ Retreat back south on Chausseestrasse until you reach the intersection with Zinnowitzerstrasse on your left. Turn left and follow the street until the name changes to Julie-Wolfthorn-Strasse. Keep going until you reach the corner of Bernauer Strasse and Gartenstrasse.



Map of the route Group One took in the night of May 1/2, 1945. Borrowed from James P. O'Donnell's book 'The Bunker'.

To your left is the 'Park am Nordbahnhof', and you are now on the grounds of the former Stettiner Bahnhof, which is in fact the former marshalling area for the cargo section of the Bahnhof. Some huts, trees and undergrowth provided a little cover. One of the huts was burning and gave much needed warmth in the cold May night.

*"General Mohnke realized that it had taken more than four hours to move less than four miles. There were still two long miles to go before Gesundbrunnen [Humbolthain Flak Tower], the second major goal of this nights march, could possibly be reached, so he called for a halt. Dawn might bring a bit more warmth and cheer. It would also bring heightened danger. The halt was supposed to last one hour. The location chosen was a freight yard near the Stettiner station, on a lot that was overgrown with forsythia and lilac bushes and hence offered some concealment."*

[The Bunker, p. 284]





Photos above are the remnants of the Nordbahnhof [Stettiner] cargo and marshalling area in 2010. Probably looks better today. At this point, I hope you have brought a blanket and some refreshments, because this is a good place to rest. So did Mohnke and his team, by now, around 4 in the morning of May 2, exhausted by the perilous and arduous journey.

**Detail:** Somewhere along the way, poor Constance Manziarly, Hitler's dietician and like him a native of Austria, got lost. Testimonies as to where exactly this happened, and what happened, are conflicting. Some believe they saw her being taken away by Russian soldiers, others thought her killed in the fighting in Friedrichstrasse and others again said she simply vanished and perhaps had decided to take off by herself.

Whatever the truth, Constance was never heard of again.

## Part II

As they were still within the Russian cordon, Mohnke realized the need to push on. Nonetheless, the rest that was supposed to last an hour stretched out to almost three, as the worn out group caught some much needed sleep, and it was broad daylight when they finally broke camp and took off again. Other ragtag units had joined them during the night and more than a hundred, perhaps even two hundred followed Mohnke along the Bernauer Strasse into the borough of Wedding, their goal being the Humboldthain Flak Tower.

➔ From the Nordbahnhof Park, proceed eastwards up Bernauer Strasse till the intersection with Brunnenstrasse. Turn left and follow Brunnenstrasse to Humboldthain Park. Enter the park and follow the winding path until you reach the top and the remnants of the Flaktower.

[In 1945, obviously, there was no 'Bunkerberg' and the tower stood 40 meters tall, bristling with guns and virtually impregnable to attack. For the same reason, the Russians simply choose to bypass the towers, not to sacrifice men and material attacking a fortress that would be bound to surrender anyway, once Berlin had fallen.]

Around nine o'clock in the morning of May 2, Mohnke's group, along with the stragglers still following, finally reached the stipulated rendezvous, they were supposed to reach during dark. The recount mention a rather unbelievable scene unfolding; some twenty Tiger tanks, heavy field artillery, weapons carriers and armored personnel wagons, all field-stripped, packed with combat-ready troops being briefed by their officers. At the center of this newfangled German 'army' stood Major General Erich Bärenfänger, a twenty-seven year old half-legendary figure in the Battle for Berlin, studying maps and issuing orders.<sup>10</sup>



The Humboldthain Flak Tower. Left, after the first blow-up attempt. Middle, after the southern part had been blown and the land-fill, that would eventually create the 'Bunkerberg' was in progress. Right; view from the remnants today.

Tours of Humboldthain are available: <https://bit.ly/3blQ0zQ>

Read the story of the Flak Towers here: <https://bit.ly/3vwOEJo>

**Mohnke:** *"It was a fantastic apparition, like a Fata Morgana. I had to rub my eyes. This otherwise unreal scene reminded me of prewar maneuvers in my days as a young troop officer, somewhere off on the Lüneburger or Romintern Heath. The sunshine, the shining weapons, the distribution of*

*field rations. No sign of serious battle fatigue. We who had been trudging all through the Berlin night were astounded. A crazy new hope rose briefly."*

Any hopes for a turn in events were quickly extinguished however, as the news of General Weidling's capitulation of the Berlin garrison came through. In accordance with the surrender terms, the defeated part must render his weapons useless. Bärenfänger's troops achieved this by spiking heavy guns, removing breeches and magazines and detonating their hand grenades. However, as it was customary in the Prussian officers cast, most of the officers hang on to their pistols for 'personal use'.

Not exactly knowing what to do next, Mohnke chose to lead his party to the grounds of the nearby Patzenhofer Brewery in Prinzenallee, just north of Humboldthain Park.

➔ **Descend the 'Bunkerberg' and exit the park at Gesundbrunnen. Follow Brunnenstrasse, then Badstrasse north until the intersection with Prinzenalle. Turn right and follow Prinzenallee to Nos. 78-79.**

In 1945 this was - allegedly - the premises of the Patzenhofer Brewery and the end of the line for most of the worn-out Germans. Here, Group One was reunited with the survivors of all ten Chancellery groups (according to Mohnke). Shortly after, the Russians had surrounded the building and while a few of the Germans escaped and others opted for suicide, most surrendered and eventually embarked on another, longer march; this time in the general direction of Siberia.



Today this is the premises of the Groterjan Brewery and the building is under 'Denkmalschutz', a protected building, and this is where our tour ends – assuming you have no taste for Siberia.

## Epilogue

Let me say straight away that I am honestly not 100% sure that this was the place where it all ended. There are – again – conflicting opinions on where our war party actually ended up. In some accounts you can read that it was the Schultheiss-Patzenhofer brewery on Schönhauser Allee [Kulturbrauerei today], others mention a brewery on Prinzenallee (and Groterjan being the only one, it thus has to be the place). The latter is claimed by Oberscharführer [Sergeant Major] Willi Rogmann, and he was allegedly there. Also the map in O'Donnell's 'The Bunker' (above) show Prinzenallee. But I'm still not sure, as I have never been able to establish a connection between the Groterjan and the Patzenhofer breweries, so the search goes on...

**I SUGGEST THAT YOU** perceive this as a challenge; do your own research; walk the walk; talk to elderly locals, if you master the tongue; be the *first* to locate – and photograph – what you think is the spot. And, of course, let us all know by posting it in the Wartraveller History Group ;-)

## Fate of the survivors

*Wilhelm Mohnke*, the former Commander of the Citadel, went into Russian captivity along with *Otto Günsche*, *Hans-Erich Voss* and *Ernst Günther Schenck*. The officers ended up in Russian POW camps and were released between 1953 and 1955. Mohnke died in 2001 (90), Günsche in 2003 (86), Schenck in 1998 (94) and vice admiral Voss died in Berchtesgaden in 1969 (72).

*Gerda Christian*, *Else Krüger* and *Traudl Junge* all made it out of Berlin to the Elbe River where they were taken in custody by the British. *Traudl Junge* also made it out unharmed, but, unable to reach her native Bavaria, she returned to Berlin, where she – according to O'Donnell – was 'robustly raped'. Constance Manziarly got separated from the group and was never heard of again.

Christian died in Düsseldorf in 1997 (83), Krüger married a British officer and moved to England until his death. She died in Germany in 2005 (89). Junge eventually found her way back to Munich. She died in 2004 (81).

*Walter Hewel* committed suicide minutes before the surrender on May 2.

The fate of *Arthur Klingemeyer* and Obersturmführer *Dose* remain unknown.

## Annotations

**O'Donnell Map text.** There is some discrepancy between the map and the written text in O'Donnell's book (based on the interview with Mohnke) as to how far the group retreated down Chausseestrasse after encountering the tank at Maikäfer Barracks. The map indicates, as you can see, a left turn at what must be Zinnowitzer Strasse, but that does not correlate well with the text where the group gets close enough to the fighting in Friedrichstrasse to have Ziegler killed by a stray grenade. I suggest you make up your own mind on which route to follow.

**The red marble** adorning the columns and walls of the Mohrenstrasse [formerly Kaiserhof] station has been alleged to be remnants of the flooring in the Reich Chancellery. This is probably not true. Said marble was reused as

cladding at the Treptower Park Memorial, and thus; some parts of Speer's building did survive, providing a link for the spectator back to 1945.



**Maikäfer [May Bug] Barracks** was the place where the renowned song by 'Lili Marlene', loved by troopers on both sides during World War Two, was born. Originally a German song, written in 1915 by one Hans Leip and sung by Lale Anderson, the 'grosse Tor' was the gate to these barracks (where Leip was stationed), and the names 'Lili' and 'Marleen' were allegedly two women acquaintances of Leip. The song was quickly translated into English and immortalized by Marlene Dietrich. Thoroughly destroyed during the Battle for Berlin, the barracks gave way to the Walter Ulbricht Stadion in 1950 and today the Bundes Nachrichten Dienst occupies the vast area. Thus, neither the Lantern nor the Gate, where the girl(s) were waiting for Liep exists today.

**Humboldthain Flak Tower** is the only remaining of a group of six in Berlin. It was partly demolished postwar, but due to the proximity of the S-Bahn, total demolition was not achievable and the remnants were covered in debris instead, creating the 'Bunkerberg'. The park houses remnants of another Flaktower, the so-called 'Leitturm' or Control Bunker. This is situated in the southern end of the park, but is today nothing more than a heap of rubble.

**Erich Bärenfänger**, an ardent Nazi and great admirer of Hitler, opted for suicide later that day along with his young wife 'in a Berlin street'. Location is unknown, but it might well have been Schönhauser Allee.

**Berliner Unterwelten**, the organization that run tours in the netherworld of Berlin, has its premises at the Gesundbrunnen U-Bahn station. A tour of the Flaktower is available, and there are also tours available in a former air-raid shelter at the station (and many other locations).

## Foul play? Rogmann's story

Willy Rogmann was a highly decorated SS Oberscharführer [sergeant major] in the Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler and an experienced front soldier who was wounded in combat eight times at various fronts. Eventually, he ended up in Berlin, partook in the vicious street fighting, survived the war and was later interviewed by Tony Le Tissier to the book; 'With our backs to Berlin.'

On the breakout, Rogmann stated:

*"When we got to the command post on the lower level we found the battalion commander and his staff sitting there in the former platform guard's office with faces that looked pale and distraught in the candlelight. Schafer said to his adjutant: 'Right, SS-Lieutenant Kronke, we are all here, you can begin.'*

*When I asked about the missing company commanders, Schäfer said; 'We don't need them at the moment. SS-Lieutenant Kronke has just returned from an order group with SS-Brigadier Mohnke at the Reichs Chancellery.' Kronke read out what he said were the Führer's last orders. We were thanked for our loyalty to the Führer and released from our oath to him. We were then informed about the new government that was to be formed, of which still in Berlin were Dr Josef Goebbels, the new Reichs Chancellor, and Martin Bormann, the Party Minister. Anyone could now go if they so wished."*

### Mohnke would lead the break-out from Friedrichstrasse himself

*"However, SS-Brigadier Mohnke had cancelled the latter statement with written orders for a break-out of all Waffen-SS troops under his command to go north from Friedrichstrasse. General Weidling's Army troops would break out to the west to join up with General Wenck's forces. SS-General Steiner would thrust toward us with his divisions and take us on to join our friends the Americans.<sup>11</sup>*

*(This sounded odd to me, for I had never heard of such 'friends' before. Only six months before these 'friends' had killed my parents with a direct hit by a bomb on their country home.) Mohnke would lead the break-out from Friedrichstrasse himself, according to these orders."*

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*"Now Schafer issued his orders. We were to go through the S-Bahn tunnels as far as was possible, which would be partly under enemy lines. As the tunnels did not run directly to Friedrichstrasse S-Bahn Station, we would climb up a certain emergency exit and continue above ground to the station, where would wait for Mohnke to issue further orders."*

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*"It was all too quiet for my liking, and that made me suspicious. Why was it taking so long? Time was not on our side, I thought. I took my HQ Section leader by the arm and we went up Friedrichstrasse. I had learnt not to do things without first making a reconnaissance, and here nobody was getting ready. We got as far as Chausseestrasse, about 780 metres up*

*Friedrichstrasse without coming under fire. Had I been free to do so, I would have taken my men and gone there and then, and with Alfred's local knowledge we probably would have got through without heavy casualties, but it was not my choice, I had to obey orders. The Russians did not appear to have noticed us and there could only have been some of their scouts in the neighbourhood."*

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*"Apparently Mohnke himself had decided the composition of the groups that would leave the Reichs Chancellery at regular intervals. There had been no mention of a combined break-out. Whether this was intentional, or through misunderstanding, I have never been able to clarify.*

*While we were waiting for Mohnke, he was already long gone with his group, which consisted of about fifteen people, whose names I was later given by SS-Captain Heinrich Mundt. Those that I can remember were: SS-Major Günsche (Hitler's ADC), SS-Captain Klingmeier (Mohnke's Adjutant), who had previously commanded the Training 8: Field Replacement Battalion of the 'Leibstandarte' at Spreenhagen, SS-Captain Mundt, previously divisional quartermaster of the 'Leibstandarte', Professor Dr Schenk, Ambassador Hewel (Foreign Office representative at the Reichs Chancellery), SS-Lieutenant Stehr (Mohnke's liaison officer), Vice Admiral Voss (Naval representative at the Reichs Chancellery), Frau Junge and Frau Christian (Hitler's secretaries), Frau Kruger (Bormann's secretary) and Frau Manziarly (Hitler's cook), plus a few officers from Mohnke's staff and SS-Major Wahl, our new regimental commander, but I cannot be sure.*

*The inclusion of four women in this group shows that Mohnke had no intention of leading the break-out from the front. Apparently he had promised Hitler to bring the women out safely, and in this he was successful with three of them who got through to the west, but the very pretty Frau Manziarly vanished without trace."*



Friedrichstrasse, north of the Weidendammer Brücke on the morning of May 2. From the bridge to the Chausseestrasse, some 700 meters, the street was littered with vehicles and dead bodies. Only a very few of the vehicles in the avant-garde managed to speed out of this carnage

*“As I learnt later, Mohnke’s group had taken the following route. They first sprinted across the open Wilhelmplatz to the Kaiserhof U-Bahn Station, along the tunnel to Mitte U-Bahn Station, from where they took the northbound tunnel under Friedrichstrasse, but when they reached the level of the Spree they found their way blocked by a closed bulkhead door guarded by two railwaymen, whose duty was to close the door after the last train had passed through at night. Although no trains had run for over a week, the doors were still closed and they refused to open them. Stupidly Mohnke accepted this and turned back to Friedrichstrasse U-Bahn Station and went along the embankment until they came to a footbridge. When one of the escort made to turn toward the station where we were waiting, Mohnke said to him: ‘No, not by Friedrichstrasse, all hell will break loose there soon!’ How right he was!”*

**WHETHER FOUL PLAY WAS AFOOT** from the very beginning of the breakout or if events simply ran sour due to the general confusion and circumstances beyond control, is anyone’s guess. At any rate, some thousand people as the crowd gathered in Friedrichstrasse; a hotchpotch of SS, Wehrmacht, Volkssturm, Hitlerjugend and lots of civilians would scarcely have gone undetected to the Russians on the north side of the Spree, regardless of the timing.

**On three occasions between 23 and 30 April 1945, Mohnke had private talks with Hitler in addition to the official situation conferences.<sup>12</sup>**

I would, however, not be one bit surprised if Rogmann was on to something in his exposition; Mohnke was an ardent Nazi and a loyal and obedient paladin to his Führer. He was also hard-hearted man who probably would have had few qualms if he had to sacrifice the many to rescue the few – if it was on his Führer’s order.

## Recommended reading:

*Axmann, Artur; Hitlerjugend*

*Baur, Hans; I was Hitler’s pilot*

*Junge, Traudl; Bis zum letzten Stunde*

*Kempka, Erich; I was Hitler’s chauffeur*

*Knappe, Siegfried; Soldat*

*Linge, Heinz; With Hitler to the End*

*Misch, Rochus; Der letzte Zeuge*

*Armin Lehmann; In the Bunker with Hitler*

*O’Donnell, James; The Bunker*

*Trevor-Roper, Hugh; The last days of Hitler*

*Le Tissier, Tony; With our backs to Berlin, and; Battlefield Guide Berlin*



## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> Oddly, in Traudl Junge's memoir, the rally point is the Chancery coal-cellar.
- <sup>2</sup> Walter Wenck's 12<sup>th</sup> Army, facing the Americans at the Elbe, was ordered to do an about-face on April 22 and march to the rescue of Berlin. Wenck, out-manned and out-gunned by the Red Army, realised that it was a futile endeavour and focussed on creating a funnel south of Berlin, linking up with Theodor Busse's 9<sup>th</sup> Army, enabling it – and countless civilians – to escape to the west.
- <sup>3</sup> The day before Hitler's suicide, Mohnke was summoned to his Führer. They spoke in private in Hitler's bedroom for over an hour.
- <sup>4</sup> Additional information (with source) will be very welcome!
- <sup>5</sup> Some accounts have Hans Baur, Hitler's pilot, in this group, but in his own account he was in Group Two, led by Werner Naumann [State Secretary], Martin Bormann [Reichsleiter], Ludwig Stumpfegger [Surgeon] and Günther Schwagermann [Adjutant to Goebbels] and other, unknown members.
- <sup>6</sup> In several historians accounts you can read that the group emerged from directly beneath the 'Speer balcony' on the Reichs Chancellery. This cannot be the case for the simple reason that there were no cellar windows in said building.
- <sup>7</sup> More about both groups in subsequent articles.
- <sup>8</sup> If it had been Mohnke's intention to link up with the other groups at Stettiner Bahnhof, why would he then have wanted to proceed north at the Chausseestrasse?
- <sup>9</sup> There are contradictory accounts of how and where Brigadeführer Joachim Ziegler met his demise. Some mention fighting in Kochstrasse, south of the Chancellery, others the Gesundbrunnen U-Bahn station. This account comes from 'The Bunker' by James P O'Donnell, allegedly quoting an interview with Wilhelm Mohnke as the source. I am still investigating.
- <sup>10</sup> This sounds completely unbelievable and is not supported by any other account, I have read. I am inclined to think that memory failed Mohnke, when he was interviewed by O'Donnell many years after. Tony Le Tissier, in his 'Battle for Berlin' has this comment, that may provide some background for Mohnke's recollection; *"We have no details, but it would appear that during the night of 30 April/1 May, General Bärenfänger pulled out what forces he could from the confused fighting around the Alexanderplatz and the Spree, where his 'Ost' Bastion had held out so well, and directed them in a breakout attempt northwards..."* [p. 169]
- <sup>11</sup> The notion that reaching Obergruppenführer Felix Steiner and his ragtag army was the target for the breakout is an enduring story, but false. Steiner was out of business at that time. Had the breakout succeeded, the remaining troops were instructed to seek north and report to Admiral Dönitz.
- <sup>12</sup> In a written statement from Mohnke to Erich Kern, August 4, 1975