

Prologue

If Hitler had survived the war and could look back on his life, one of the things that probably would stand out in his memory would be the difference in the manner of which his 56 birthdays were celebrated.



We know very little factual about his early life. We know that in his own recollection, his mother adored him (and he her) and his father disciplined him heavily. Or in his own words; *“I respected my father, but I loved my mother!”* Thus, his early birthdays were probably celebrated in the same way as in thousand of other lower middleclass German homes; there would likely be cake and chocolate, Adolf – or ‘Adi’, as his mother lovingly called him – would receive a gift; a toy or a book, maybe a cowboy novel by Karl May,¹ and he might even be allowed to influence what would be served for dinner that evening.

As he grew older, the clashes with the disciplinarian father intensified as the duo haggled over the future occupation for young Hitler. His father, himself having fought his way up from modest existence to become an imperial customs officer, wanted his son to follow the same course. Adolf, on the other hand, lazy at school and prone to high-flying dreams, saw himself as an artist; a view that enraged the elder Hitler. How his birthdays played out in that period is unknown but would probably have been dependant on the atmosphere in the home.

“A reliable historical record of Adolf’s early years is skimpy at best. His own account in Mein Kampf is superficial in detail and veiled in high-flown rhetoric. Post-war recollections of family and acquaintances have to be treated with care, and are at times as dubious as the attempts during the Third Reich itself to glorify the childhood of the future Führer. For the formative period so important to psychologists and ‘psycho-historians’, the fact has to be faced that there is little to go by which is not retrospective guesswork.”

[Ian Kershaw, ‘Hitler’, p. 3]

ON JANUARY 3, 1903, when Hitler was 13, his father, Alois, passed away. This relieved tension in the home, and the civil service pension he left his family probably made it possible for Adi's devoted mother to further cuddle her beloved son. It did enable him to move to Vienna at the tender age of seventeen, supported by orphans' benefits, and lead a sort of bohemian existence, drifting through life without obligations or any clear plan for his future. It is thus conceivable that he – on birthdays – treated himself to a healthy meal, a lager² and a night at the opera, his principal passion, to listen to the bombastic tunes of Wagner.

Two attempts to enter the School of Fine Arts miscarried; he simply did not possess the talent required to become an artist. On the advice of the school's headmaster, he subsequently tried to become an architect, but alas; his laziness in the 'Realschule' and ensuing lack of proper credentials prevented even this opportunity from materializing. For a time he was living as a part-time tramp in the streets of Vienna, sleeping at shelters and making a living by selling mediocre drawings of the city's landmarks to tourists. It is likely, that his birthdays were no feast during this period.

The idle existence came to a halt at the outbreak of the Great War in 1914. At that time Hitler was living in Munich and in a fit of patriotic fervor he, like so many other young men of the time, joined the Imperial Army. Here, Hitler finally found something he badly needed; structure and a direction in life. A family, so to speak. This period too is sparse with personal information, but albeit being considered something of an odd bird by his fellow soldiers, he probably enjoyed the companionship and camaraderie that exist among peers, also on his birthdays.

THE END OF THE GREAT WAR came as a devastating blow to Hitler, not only ruining his patriotic dreams but also threatened to take his secure army-life away from him. As it went, he managed to stay in the service, working undercover as a snitch; spying on political movements that the military wanted to keep an eye on. As a result of this occupation he came into contact with an obscure leftwing party, calling itself the DAP [Deutsche Arbeiter Partei] and, as we know, eventually ascended to become its leader and – finally – Germany's Führer.

As he was climbing to power, the nature of his birthdays took a dramatic turn. Gifts from German women began pouring in; German cities were emblazoned with Swastika banners; banquettes and parades were held, all in all a pompous display of worship that culminated in the magnificent spectacle of his last prewar birthday; April 20, 1939; a show worthy of a triumphant Roman Emperor.

"In the prewar years Hitler's birthdays would begin with a serenade by the band of the SS-Liebstandarte. When Hitler then descended the staircase from his first floor apartment in the Radziwill Palace, he would be greeted by a host of ministers' and adjutants' children in their party best holding colorful posies. Hitler evidently enjoyed taking his breakfast with the children, and for the photographers the table scenes were a welcome opportunity. The official chorus of congratulations would follow and then would come the Wehrmacht parade in the Tiergarten-Strasse.

The historical Congress Hall which separated Hitler's apartment on the first floor from the service rooms of the Reichs Chancellery would have been cleared a few weeks before 20 April. The presents received would be

stacked on the long negation table and additional tables brought in for the purpose if necessary. The scent of small almond trees, carnations and roses would perfume the room. There was the widest range of presents imaginable: valuable, useful, beautiful, artistic. Paintings, sculptures, candelabras, carpets, old weapons, rare coins, clocks, accessories for the writing desk, briefcases, books, music scores and much more.



Photo: One of the more quirky gifts for the fiftieth anniversary; Dr. Ferdinand Porsche – who also presented Hitler with the first VW model – has prepared for his Führer ... a toy car.

Then the handicrafts: pillows and blankets wit National Socialist symbols, or legends such as Heil mein Führer!. How many thoughts from fanatical, adoring women had been woven into this handiwork! Mountains of baby clothes, bed sheets and blankets finished up later in the archive room of the Private Chancellery to be carefully sorted for distribution to needy families. Cakes with artistic structures and inscriptions, baskets of delicacies and more or less all the edible stuff were sent on Hitler's orders to hospitals. Valuable items ended up in the showcases and cabinets of the Führer-flats, handicrafts without National Socialist emblems in visitor's rooms. Later in the war field-gray socks knitted by women of the Nazi Women's organizations were piled into great mountains in the four corners of the Congress Hall."

[Christa Schroeder: 'He was my Chef', p. 68-69]

What a turn circumstances had taken just six years later; Berlin lay in ruins; the Thousand Year Reich had crumbled; the war he had started was all but lost; the Gold Pheasants paying him their hollow well-wishing were all in a hurry to abandon Berlin - and him; there were no magnificent parades and if the weather was 'Führerwetter', the sun vanished in the smoke from smoldering ruins.

A penny for his thoughts...

April 20, 1945

Hitler's Last Birthday

Hitler was born in Braunau am Inn, Austria, on April 20, 1889, and thus turned 56 years old in 1945, albeit he looked more like 76. Throughout his twelve years at the helm of the German state, his birthday had become a national holiday; a day of public celebration; jubilation in Swastika-festooned streets and elaborate military parades. His last birthday in Berlin 1939, at the pinnacle of his power, had been a showcase worthy of a Caesar.

Today, a mere six years later, everything had changed. The magnificent metropolis of Berlin – destined to be ‘Germania’, prime capital of the world – was now a sheer moonscape; its inhabitants scavenging for food and shelter, and himself he huddled in a concrete sarcophagus, abandoned by those who once swore their undying allegiance and faithfulness until death.

The Red Army was virtually at his doorstep and deep underground, in the Führerbunker, surrounded by a few faithful, Adolf Hitler awaited the inevitable...

The backdrop

Overview of the military situation on April 20th, 1945; The Battle of the Seelow Heights east of Berlin is closing to an end. It has been four days since Marshal Georgy Zhukov, the Soviet supreme commander, crossed the Oder River and unleashed his amassed one-and-a-half million troops against the more modest forces of the defender, General Gotthard Heinrici, who could muster some 100.000 men. The difference between the two forces, not only in manpower but even more in material, could foretell the outcome for any sensible man; artillery 20:1, tanks 10:1 and complete air superiority on the Russian side spelled doom for the defenders.

All Heinrici had working for him was his intimate knowledge of Russian tactics which he managed to employ in time to render the massive Russian artillery barrage relatively futile, as his troops had left their forward positions only hours before.³ As a result, the following infantry and armor attack over the river met stiffer German resistance than expected. Incomplete reports speak of more than 225 Russian tanks destroyed on this day.

After an initial setback, caused partly by a somewhat choleric and impatient Zhukov, deploying his armour prematurely and taking heavy casualties as they stuck in the marshy soil of the Oder valley, the Russians are now steamrolling forward in panzer spearheads, leaving the following infantry to deal with the remaining defenders. By that time additional break-throughs⁷ has been achieved both north and south of Zhukov's main thrust.

At 04:00 in the morning, Fall Clausewitz – the order, which turned Berlin into a “front city” – was issued. This order called for evacuation to the south of non-essential administrative personnel and the destruction of government archives in Berlin etc.

The rapid advance of the Russian forces caught Hitler off-balance. Believing that the Oder would be a formidable, natural barrier, he had demanded that his forces must be able to hold the line and even throw the advancing enemy back over the river; by any standard an impossible task.



Photo: Birthday reception in the Reich Chancellery. Borrowed from the 2004 Oliver Hirschbiegel blockbuster, 'Der Untergang'

Birthday reception

Birthdays are traditionally occasions where people, perhaps especially in their senior years, reflect on the past and ponder what the future will bring, and the situation in Berlin could certainly submerge even the most phlegmatic ‘Geburtstagskind’ in deep, worried thoughts. But appearances were to be kept up and as German tradition demanded, the Führer was celebrated by the top Nazi brass at a ceremony in the ruins of the Chancellery.⁴ The assembled dignitaries clicked their heels in best Prussian manner and courtly expressed their wishes for the future, although some had difficulty finding the right words as Hitler walked the line, shaking hands in silence with each of them.

None of the notabilities could see what the German Führer thought of his own future, nor did many of them probably care. Their main concern was to escape the doomed city of Berlin post haste, most of them with vows to ‘continue the fight’ from safer places hither and yon; in the north, south or west. Oddly, none of these highly decorated Nazi heroes grabbed the otherwise apparent opportunity to fight in the east, where the enemy steamrolled forward.

“Morituri te salutant”

Artur Axmann, the one-armed leader of the Hitlerjugend, had a special birthday present for his master; the boys born in the year 1929, and thus sixteen years old, “...wished to be accepted into the HJ and die in combat, defending their Führer”

Axmann makes no mention of Hitlers response, but it has most likely been favorable as every man – or boy – counted in the final struggle.



Photo: Hitler with the Hitler Youth boys who have excelled in battle in Silesia. Note that the photo is a still from a take by Walter Frentz on March 20, 1945. No photos were taken on April 20, although Frentz was still in the bunker [until April 22]; at least none have surfaced.

Since the days for elaborate Wehrmacht parades down the East-West Axis and the solemn adornment of victorious Generals with Knights Crosses and Oak Leaves were now long passé, a few Hitler Youth soldiers who had excelled in combat were lined up for the Führer to inspect and decorate. The somewhat befuddled boys watched their great leader in disbelief; a shaky old geezer, worn out and deprived of his former air of authority and self-assuredness. He patted a cheek here and there as Iron Crosses were handed out and spoke of the military situation which was serious, but in no way hopeless; what they had to do was to hold out – ‘ausharren’ – until new miracle weapons would turn the tide of war and secure the final victory, the Endsieg, for Germany. There was no applause, or even response, to his final “*Heil Euch!*” (Hail to you).⁵

THE SS WERE DETERMINED, however, to have a parade, as it is described by Oberscharführer [Sergeant] Willi Rogmann: “*This morning yet again a Birthday-parade for Hitler was arranged and I had to take part in it. Thus I marched past Brigadeführer Mohnke and his Staff in the first row of the 1. Wachkompanie*”.

[Berlin 1945, p. 189 – my translation].

The conference

In the Bunker, the final conference to be attended by all the top military chieftains was held; Grand Admiral Dönitz, commander of the German Navy was there; Heinrich Himmler, the omnipotent Chief of the sinister SS forces and dethroned commander of the Army Group Vistula.⁶

Also Albert Speer, minister of armaments, and Joachim von Ribbentrop, the foreign minister, were there, and Hermann Göring too. The tubby Reich Marshal and commander of the once so mighty Luftwaffe secretly checked his watch.⁷

That same morning he had evacuated his lavish country estate ‘Carinhalle’ north-east of the capital and sent his carefully collected loot of art treasures from museums and private collections all over Europe – twenty-four lorries strong – southwards to Bavaria before blowing up the mansion with

dynamite. With the Russians virtually on the doorstep, he had no plans of staying in or near Berlin and like the rest of the brass, he had better things to do than listen to his Warlord's maneuvers with virtually non-existing skeleton divisions.



Photo: Another scene from Der Untergang; Göring does not look too happy.

In the north, forces under General Rokossovsky had established firm bridgeheads, advancing on the town of Prenzlau; a mere 100 kilometers from Berlin. To the east, Zhukov was pushing on Strausberg; just 50 kilometers away and to the south, Koniev's forces were smashing Busse's 9th Army on the Oder, threatening to encircle them completely.

The reports were thus gloomy on all fronts; the Reich crumbled by the hour and Berlin itself was already half encircled. At 16:00 hours, news that Russian troops under General Koniev have taken Spremberg, south of Cottbus, and thus are close to the Dresden-Berlin highway, reaches the Bunker. In fact, General Karl Koller, Luftwaffe Chief of Staff, warned that the last route out of Berlin to the south could not be held open much longer and consequently now it was time for a bold dash towards the Bavarian mountains and the 'National Redoubt'.



Photo: Part of the huge bunker facility carved into the mountain under Hitler's 'Berghof'. Much of the complex is flooded today, but a part is still accessible to visitors. Authors collection 2010.

Several of the Nazi bonzen tried to persuade Hitler to use this opportunity and relocate his HQ to the mythical National Redoubt⁸ in Berchtesgaden. They pleaded that the Führer could conduct the war only from there, where he had freedom of action and not as a mere prisoner in beleaguered Berlin, but Hitler vacillated. As long as he stayed in Berlin, he said, and radiated his will to the defenders, Berlin would hold. If he left, Berlin would fall as East Prussia had done when he left it. He did, however, implement the decision of a split command taken some time earlier; in case that Germany was severed by the enemy, Grand Admiral Dönitz would command the north and Field Marshal Kesselring the south.

AS TO THE DEFENSE OF BERLIN, the 9th Army offered a glimmer of hope as it still presented a considerable fighting force. Withdrawn to the city boundaries, thus avoiding encirclement and shortening its front while at the same time making re-supply and reinforcement a lot easier, it could offer stiff resistance at least for some time. But Hitler, true to his WW1 philosophy of digging in and holding the ground, refused the pleas from an ever more desperate Heinrich, as did he refuse almost anything his military advisers came up with.



Photo: 8th Air Force B17s discharging their payload somewhere over Germany, virtually unopposed by the Luftwaffe.

At around 10 am, the American 8th Air Force delivered their birthday greetings in a show of force.⁹ One thousand silver birds crammed the blue skies over the city in a two-hour raid, above range of anti-aircraft guns and virtually unchallenged by German fighters, unleashing hell once again on the defenseless population which knew no other means than to huddle themselves in cellars, U-Bahn stations and air raid shelters. The air raid also heralded the de facto end to the city's amenities services; water, gas and

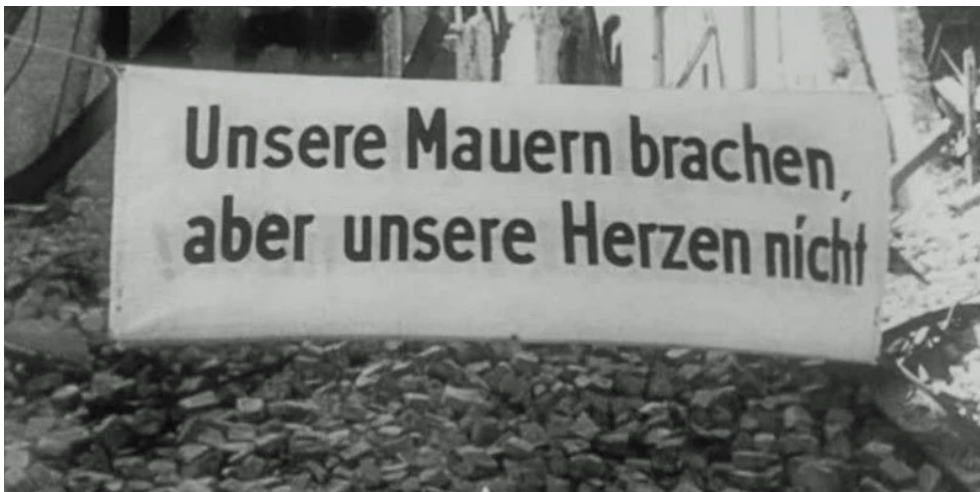
sewage and most of the electricity, forcing the last factories within city limits to close down.



Photo: In the movie 'Der Untergang', a loving Eva Braun prepares a birthday cake [right]. Good intentions not diminished, the result was perhaps not quite up to the 1939 standard.

Gloomy military prospects or not, Hitler's bedfellow through twelve years, Eva Braun, was in no mood for melancholy. She had arrived from Berchtesgaden only weeks before to be with her lover till the end, and now gathering what she could of birthday guests, bunker dwellers and staff she set out to arrange a little spontaneous party in the Führerwohnung upstairs. According to Rochus Misch, the telephone operator, the Bunker was soon all but deserted, with just Hitler and himself in their respective rooms

OUTSIDE THE CITADEL, in Berlin proper, there was little acknowledgment of the Führer's birthday. Greatest concern for Berliners these days was to catch some much needed sleep and avoid getting killed during air raids. Most of the working population had at this point been terminated in their jobs, and only left the house to scavenge for food, fetch water from the hand-cranked pumps in the streets or stand in shopping lines when rumor had it that meat, flour, sugar or some other coveted article was available. This morning too, the women queued for provisions, the distant roar of artillery heralding that it may be their last chance.



Some celebration banners had been prepared though. Most commonly the Goebbels-coined phrase “*Our walls are broken, but not our hearts*” was seen, but on a ruined building in Lützowplatz, a poster displayed the somewhat dubious message; “*We thank our Führer for everything*”, another placard read; “*We all pull on the same rope: Up the Führer!*”, leaving interpretation to the observer.

Eyewitness Jacob Kronika: “*For years they shouted ‘Heil!’ Now they hate the man, who calls himself their Führer. They hate him, they fear him; because of him they suffer hardship and death. But they have not the power or the courage to liberate themselves from his demonic reign. Despairing and passive they await the last act of the drama.*”

[Kronika, p. 127 – my translation]

Accustomed with weeks of night bombing, many Berliners spent the night in their air raid shelters, huddled together in cramped and damp cellars, bringing their few important items with them in bags and valises; identity papers, money, ration-cards, a few items of clothing, some jewelry maybe, and some food. There they nervously followed the progress of the air raid, listened to the impact of bombs and tried to estimate how close they came.

Eyewitness Anonyma: “*Now and then whole hours would pass in eerie silence. Then, all of a sudden, you remember that it’s spring. Clouds of lilac perfume drift over from untended gardens and go wafting through the charred ruins of apartment houses ... there’s freshly turned earth around the garden sheds up and down Berliner Strasse. Only the birds seem suspicious of this particular April: there’s not a single sparrow nesting in the gutters of our roof.*”

[Anonyma, p. 17]



The night before, Goebbels had held a flaming speech on the radio, designed to rally the people to support their Führer and put their trust in him and his lucky star to alleviate them from their present predicament. As

electricity was a sparse commodity¹⁰ in the ravished Capital, and as most Berliners at this point were fed up with lies and broken promises, his rhetoric probably fell largely on deaf ears.

Eyewitness Anonyma: *“Our radio’s been dead for four days. Once again we see what a dubious blessing technology really is. Machines with no intrinsic value, worthless if you can’t plug them in somewhere. Bread, however, is absolute. Coal is absolute.”*

[Anonyma, p. 21]

On this day of celebration, a new poster went up on the tattered walls of the city, curtsy of the Fortress Commandant. It read:

"All members of the armed forces at present in Berlin and cut off from their units, all men on leave, all those traveling through Berlin, all convalescents and wounded are ordered to report at once to the von Seeckt Barracks in Potsdam, with enough food to last them for twenty-four hours."

[Kuby, p. 99-100]

Although virtually derived of useful and trustworthy information, newspapers, now down to one sheet printed on both sides, were eagerly awaited by Berliners, hungry for news. Some information could be derived from the Wehrmacht communiqués, describing in vague sentences the cities and villages fallen to the enemy and thus the overall progress of the Red Army. Müncheberg, halfway between Berlin and the Seelow Höhen, was mentioned, indicating a breakthrough of the Oder front was a reality. To the dismay of Berliners, the papers also brought a notice, that starting April 21st, use of public transport was reserved citizens with a red Class III ticket [which virtually no-one had].

In fact, the war was coming to Berlin this very day, when long-range guns of the Russian 3rd Army (79th Rifle Corpse) fired a “birthday salute” into the city shortly after noon. As the shells landed in the suburbs, only few people noticed.

[Le Tissier, p. 35]

In the Bunker, at 22:00 hours, Secretaries Johanna Wolf and Christa Schröder are summoned to Hitler who informs them that they must leave for Berchtesgaden post haste. They are to pack immediately; in one hour at car will speed them off to the south. As it went, the intended route through Czech Protectorate was already impassable and they were forced to fly early next morning

Due east of Berlin, Marshal Zhukov’s 1st Belorussian’s had at last managed to break the desperate resistance at Seelow and were racing towards Berlin, pushing the remnants of the German forces ahead of them. Among them was the 56th Panzer Korps. Functioning as “fire brigade” to the 9th Army,

the corps had been involved in harsh fighting, but forced on the retreat again and again to avoid encirclement.



Photo: T34 tanks somewhere in Germany

SOUTH OF BERLIN, in the OKW/OKH headquarter at Zossen,¹¹ an increasingly nervous General Krebs is calling the Führerbunker, insisting that the facility – equipped with one of Europe’s most modern communications networks – is evacuated before the Russian onslaught. Air reconnaissance the same

morning had revealed the approach of Russian forces, unpleasantly close to Berlin; from the south-east, an armored column 800 vehicles strong was spotted on the road from Cottbus to Lübbenau, and, advancing from the south along the road to Luckau, just some 50 kilometers from Zossen and the cream of the General Staff, as many as 300 T34’s had been observed

To counter the latter attack, the Zossen guard company, some 250 strong and supported by a handful of light armored vehicles from the nearby Panzertruppenschule II in Wünsdorf under the command of one Oberlieutenant Gustav Kraenkel, was late in the afternoon ordered to block the approach road at Luckau and throw the enemy back. A somewhat tall order ...¹²

FURTHER SOUTH, IN BAVARIA, after a five-day battle with fierce hand-to-hand urban combat, the iconic heart of the Nazi movement, the ‘sacred’ city of Nuremberg, Hauptstadt der Reichsparteitage, as it was anointed in Nazi rhetoric, ominously fell to American forces on this, the Führer’s birthday.



Photo: Nuremberg after the war. Heavy RAF bombing on January 2, 1945 left the medieval city center in ruins. Last raid was on April 11. On the photo, soldiers of the 3rd US Infantry Division.

Further reading

- Anonymous: ‚**A woman in Berlin**‘, © 2011 Virago
Groehler, Olaf: ‚**Die Neue Reichskanzlei**‘, © 1995 Berlin
Knappe, Siegfried: ‚**Soldat**‘, © 1992 World War II Library
Kronika, Jacob: ‚**Berlins Undergang**‘, © 2015 L&R
Kuby, Erich: ‚**The Russians and Berlin**‘, © 1968 Hill & Wang
Mühlen, Bengt von zur: ‚**Berlin 1945**‘, © 2014 Bucher
Reed & Fischer: ‚**The Fall of Berlin**‘, © 1992 Reed & Fischer
Tissier, Tony le: ‚**With our backs to Berlin**‘, © 2005 Sutton

Notes

¹ The passion for German writer Karl May’s novels about cowboys and Indians stayed with Hitler throughout his life and he would often recommend them to others, especially his generals whom he accused of ‘lacking fantasy’.

² Hitler did not become a teetotaller and a vegetarian before late in his life. Testimonies from people close to him are inconsistent, but there are indications that he did eat meat as late as 1937. Heinz Linge, his personal valet, says 1943.

³ Heinrici’s almost mythical foresight that led him to move the troops on the eve of battle was probably helped by the capture of a ‘tongue’; a Russian soldier capable of providing the necessary information.

⁴ Several historians’ accounts have this event taking place in the Führerbunker. Speer, who was there, states that it took place in the dilapidated Reichs Chancellery [Speer, 632].

⁵ This account is taken from the memoirs of Armin Lehmann, a Hitler Youth courier, but there were in fact TWO such events which have frequently been mistaken for each other, one on March 20th and one on April 20th. According to several sources, Lehmann was NOT at the famous March event shown in photos and movies taken in the Chancellery Garden. Lehmann thus must refer to the other event involving HJ boys that were presented in the Ehrenhof (Honor Courtyard) on April 20th, Hitler’s Birthday. This was a much smaller affair and this event was NOT photographed. At least no photos from this event have ever surfaced. Other than Lehmann, no one else present on April 20th mentions a photographer being present, Artur Axmann specifically deny it. Lehmann may just be confusing the two events. He WAS present at the second event on April 20th." [Lehmann, p. 86-9], [Axmann, p. 418], [Kuby, p. 100], (Axis History Forum). Consequently, what was said and done at either event will be a matter of speculation.

⁶ Himmler, who lacked any real military knowledge, proved to be a disastrous commander and thus General Gotthard Heinrici replaced him as commander of Army Group Vistula on March 20th, 1945.

⁷ Eventually, Goering would flee the capital in direction Berchtesgaden, leaving Luftwaffe General Karl Koller to take Hitler’s abuse over the poor efforts of the air force. However, before he managed to get out of Berlin, the last Allied air raid forced him to take cover in a public shelter. Although largely responsible for the situation, his popularity with the Berliners was unscratched. He joked with the people in the bunker, made excuses for his obesity and admitted to his self-imposed nickname “Maier” [Koller, p. 42].

⁸ This National Redoubt was a Nazi phantom that had grown to mythical proportions; an impregnable mountain fortress deep in the Bavarian heartland with unlimited supplies and a defense that crisscrossed the entire area with bunkers, tunnels, gun emplacements and a

mighty force of stalwart SS troops, ready to fight to the last drop of blood for their Führer. In reality there was no fortress, just Hitler's villa with an underground air raid shelter – though quite elaborate – and a small detachment of SS troops.

⁹ The morning raid was followed by sporadic RAF attacks throughout the day with fast Mosquito bombers and a final night raid with heavy bombers.

¹⁰ “From 10.50 a.m. on 20 April, there was no power apart from brief spills of a few minutes at a time. The last factories were forced to close down, and throughout the city, using electricity for cooking became an offence punishable by death” [Byford-Jones, p. 335].

¹¹ The 60,000-acre area some 70 kilometers south of Berlin had by breakout of WW2 become Europe's largest military base, dotted with bunkers disguised as handsome country buildings, some of which survive to this day. Bunker complexes called “Maybach” (a command center) and “Zeppelin” (communications) were built beginning in 1934 by the Nazi regime. The initial communications links constructed in 1934–1935 involved considerable redundancy to better withstand air attack. The Zossen bunker complex was well connected with subterranean links to the military commands in central Berlin, and to a trunk cable ring buried around the city. Priority construction of the Zeppelin bunker in 1937– 1939 involved installation of dozens of massive telephone and telegraph switchboards. Most were operational by August 1939 in time for the German attack on Poland. Radio facilities were also added. Substantial battery backups guaranteed continued operation even with loss of the electric power grid due to air attack.

[Excerpt from: Hans George Kampe, The underground military Command Bunkers of Zossen, Germany].

¹² The following morning at 9, in a call to HQ, Oberleutnant Kraenkel reported his counter-attack against the Russian forces had been beaten back with heavy losses, and the enemy spearhead proceeds in a northerly direction. Again Krebs seeks Hitler's permission to evacuate and again it's denied.