

Prelude

The circumstances surrounding – and even the very veracity of – the death of Adolf Hitler have been questioned ever since the Red Army entered the Führerbunker on May 2, 1945. Over the years his demise has been subject to numerous portrayals in magazines, books on end and several motion pictures. These depictions have ranged from sober and more or less accurate descriptions¹ of how the event unfolded to the wildest, unfounded speculations of a last-minute escape, employing look-alikes, willing to die in the Führer's place, daring take-offs by air from various places in besieged Berlin, and final hideouts in South America; in the mountains of Norway; on a secret base in Antarctica - or even on the Moon.

What transpired in the Führerbunker on that afternoon of April 30, 1945 was and is shrouded in an unsteady light, veiled in incomplete and sometimes conflicting testimonies and thus, it seems a reasonable effort to offer a walk-through of the events in that concrete coffin some eight meters under the marshy Berlin soil as far as it is possible to discern; establish a timeline based on eyewitness testimonies, analyses and conclusions by renowned historians and the circumstantial evidence available.

The following step-by-step account is based on some sixty books on the subject that I have plowed through since I started this undertaking² in 2009 and represent, to my mind - and with due respect for Napoleon's words on history - the 'truth' as accurately as it is humanly possible to establish it.

**"The facts are now clear, and if myths, like the truth,
depend on evidence, we are safe.
But myths are not like truths; they are the triumph of
credulity over evidence."**

Hugh Trevor-Roper



Photo: As no (known) photo exist, we will turn to Oliver Hirschbiegel's excellent 2004 movie 'Der Untergang'.

The day before, April 29, an ailing Hitler had yielded to the wishes of his mistress through many, many years and offered her, the faithful Eva Braun,³

21 years his junior, his trembling hand in marriage. It was a short ceremony, and it may have been difficult for the groom to get into the proper spirit, considering the overall situation. His spouse however, was reported to be “radiant” with joy, apparently forgetting or overlooking the recent murder of her brother-in-law [the Fegelein affair].

On this day, the fighting had reached the center of Berlin with ferocious house-to-house combat; positions shifting hands as attacks and counter-attacks raged. Hitler summons Brigadier Mohnke, commander of the Citadel, and asks for how long his troops can hold out. “24 hours max!” is the laconic answer. In the wee hours, Radio Munich had reported Hitler’s death, but the rumor was rapidly denounced by the Reichs Chancellery.

“At this point, the Red Army stood just a few hundred meters from the Führerbunker”

THE MILITARY SITUATION ON APRIL 30: Yesterday the Führer had telexed the five now renowned questions to Keitel in Plön, demanding information of the whereabouts of Wenck’s 12th Army and Busse’s 9th, and their itinerary for the liberation of Berlin. Today, 01:00 in the morning, Keitel had answered in the negative; Wenck was bogged down by strong Russian forces, Busse’s 9th Army was encircled; there would be no marching on Berlin, no liberation; the last straw had proved to be yet another illusion!

At this point in time, the Red Army stood just a few hundred meters from the Führerbunker; Alexanderplatz in the west had fallen; the Landwehrkanal had been crossed on several places; fighting was going on the Potsdamer Platz and massive forces were building up for a decisive thrust across the Spreebogen to the coveted trophy; the Reichstag. Stalin had let his commanders know that he would be *very disappointed* if the ‘German Kremlin’ had not fallen prior to the May Day celebrations in Moscow.⁴ Defending forces within the Citadel were tenaciously resisting the onslaught, but; exhausted, out-manned, out-gunned and low on supplies of all kinds, the result would eventually be a given.

It was not to be a walk in the park for the Soviets though...



Photo: House-to-house combat in central Berlin. Spiegel documentary

Preparations and good-byes

THE STAGE: What we understand as the ‘Führerbunker’ was actually two separate bunkers; the old Chancellery air-raid shelter, known at the “Vorbunker” (ante-bunker), and the 1944-45 addition; the actual bunker that was built for Hitler’s protection, also referred to as the “Tiefbunker”, the deep or lower bunker. As the denotations suggest, the bunkers were in two different levels connected by a staircase with four flights. The Hitlers’ occupied five rooms in the lower bunker. Adolf Hitler had a combined office and living room, (where the suicides took place), an ante-room and a bedroom). Eva had her bedroom and an adjoining small dressing room. The couple shared a joint bathroom (the only one in the bunker). The only entrance from the ‘suite’ led to the Conference Passage or waiting room, and further down the isle was the generator room, where mechanic Johannes Hentschel resided and next door telephone operator Rochus Misch managed the switchboard. Entrance and exit to the lower bunker was possible either through the ante-bunker or through the emergency exit into the Chancellery Garden. [See this old Note: <https://bit.ly/3KpaiEd> for drawing and details].

PERSONAE DRAMATIS: Apart from the Hitlers’, the following persons were in the Bunker in briefer or longer periods during the day; Joseph & Magda Göbbels; Martin Bormann; Generals Krebs & Burgdorf; Heinz Linge, valet; Otto Günsche, adjutant; Erich Kempka, chauffeur; secretaries Else Kruger, Traudl Junge & Gerda Christian; Constanze Manziarly, the cook; Ludwig Stumpfegger, the surgeon; Rochus Misch & Johannes Hentschel; Artur Axmann & Günther Weltzin, Hitler Youth Leader and his deputy; Wilhelm Mohnke, commander of the ‘Zitadelle’; Walther Hewel, diplomat. A few were visitors on that day; Dr. Haase, surgeon at the Chancellery dressing station; Major General Rattenhuber, chief of the RSD; Vice Admiral Hans-Erich Voss, liaison to Dönitz; General Helmuth Weidling, commander of the Berlin defenses along with his adjutant, Major Siegfried Knappe [to whom we owe much inside information].



Photo: Farewell to the faithful paladins

THE PLAY: The sequence of events as they played out the last 24 hours; two larger goodbye scenes unfolded, one in the wee hours of April 30, and one

in the afternoon, imminent to the suicides. It is not quite clear who attended the various goodbyes, but we have a few accounts to lean on:

- ▶ Between 01:00 and 02:00, Hitler congratulated Gruppenführer Johann Rattenhuber [RSD chief] in the upper bunker with his forty-eight birthday.
- ▶ First goodbyes, approx. 02:30; Hitler summoned about twenty persons to the lower bunker; he emerged in the company of Bormann, shaking hands in silence with the assembled ladies and gentlemen (secretaries, the cook, officers). Apparently both the Goebbels' were there too, likewise Hewel, Rattenhuber and Generals Krebs and Burgdorf.
- ▶ 06:00; Hitler's conversation with Mohnke (lasting up to 60 min.), who informs his Führer that the hour has come; his troops can hold out no more than 24 hours max. Hitler thanks him and praise the courage of the soldiers. By the same token he reveals why he had wanted to hold out until May 5th, it is the day Napoleon died (1821, on St. Helena); *"Another great career that ended in total disappointment, disillusion, betrayal, despair"*. Mohnke leaves somewhat puzzled.
- ▶ At 13:00, an SS Sturmführer arrives at Bendlerblock [Headquarters of General Weidling], carrying Hitler's last orders; there is to be no surrender, but breakouts of smaller groups to join fighting units or to continue resistance 'from the woods' were permitted. A relieved Weidling dispatch a vehicle post haste to warn divisional commanders that a breakout westwards through Charlottenburg would be instigated at 22:00 hours the same evening (not to be confused with the breakout by the Chancellery group in the night of May 1, led by Mohnke).
- ▶ Approx 13:00 – 14:00, Hitler takes his last meal in the company of the cook, Manziarly and the secretaries Christian and Junge. Eva was not present (or maybe she was. Traudl Junge records her as present in her memoir albeit she said something different in 1954).
- ▶ After 14:00, Linge accompanies Hitler as he has a talk with Göbbels. Purportedly, the little Propaganda Minister tries to persuade Hitler to leave Berlin, but Hitler briskly refuses.⁵ He in turn suggests that Göbbels and family leave the city, but the offer is declined.
- ▶ 15:00 (approx), second goodbyes; The newlywed Hitlers' emerge from their quarters to greet; Göbbels (without Magda), Bormann, Generals Krebs and Burgdorf, Ambassador Walter Hewel, Vice Admiral Voss, Dr. Haase, Rattenhuber, Colonel Högl, Linge, Günse, and the secretaries Christian, Junge and Krueger.
- ▶ Following this scene Heinz Linge, Hitler's valet, momentarily loses his composure and freaks out, running up the stairs of the emergency exit. Traudl Junge also leaves the lower bunker and encounters the Göbbels children, sitting on the stairs to the ante-bunker. She ushers them up in the General Dining Passage where she fixes them lunch. Time is now approx 15:20.
- ▶ Otto Günse assumes guarding position in front of the door to Hitler's ante-room, his weapon drawn. Listeners, who are either in the Conference Passage or in the Map Room, now comprises Göbbels, Bormann, Krebs, Burgdorf, Günse and Linge (who have returned).

► Magda Göbbels suddenly arrives, visibly agitated, demanding to see Hitler. Taken aback, Günsche yields and Magda pushes past him and into Hitler's living room. In tears she implores the Führer to leave Berlin.



Photo: An agitated Magda Goebbels is pleading Günsche to see Hitler one last time. 'The Downfall'

► An emotional, but brief (1-3 minute) conversation ensues. Hitler turns Magda down and she leaves the Führer in tears, sobbing her way back to her own quarters and ignoring her husband in the Passage. The doors to Hitler's quarters are closed behind her.

► The spectators again assume their waiting position, when Arthur Axmann arrives accompanied by Major Günther Weltzin, his aide. Axmann too demands to see Hitler, but this time Günsche is firm. Allegedly he states; *"Too late for anyone"*.

► The time is now approx. 15:30. This is the point, where, according to Trevor-Roper's 1946 account, a shot rings out (This was largely based on the testimony of Erich Kempka. However, he was en route with the canisters of petrol at this time and cannot have heard anything - which he later admitted). Also Traudl Junge refers to a shot in her account, albeit she sets the time to before or just around 15:00, and she was situated some 30 meters away in the upper level of the ante-bunker.

Axmann recounts in his memoir that Dr. Goebbels asked; *"Was that not a gunshot?"*, but no other testimony from individuals, who were present in the immediate vicinity of Hitler's rooms; Günsche, Linge, Misch or other, supports that a shot is heard.

Suicide a Deux

At 15:30 in the afternoon a shot rang out in the confines of the Führerbunker (albeit hardly anyone heard it⁶), heralding the death of the Moloch. Obeying their instructions to the letter, his entourage waits the stipulated ten minutes before entering Hitler's private quarters.

THE SUICIDES: Following the goodbyes in the Conference Passage, Mr. and Mrs. Hitler had withdrawn to their five-room suite to prepare themselves for the journey to the next world. We don't know exactly how this last scene unfolded or what was said, but it is a fair assumption that some pleasantries and reassurances of eternal love were exchanged, physical contact most certainly also; a loving embrace, a stroke on a cheek, a last kiss. Goodbye, my love.



Photo: Hitler's sitting room with the sofa where the suicides 'a deux' took place. I believe that I can see blood spattered on the armrest? The original caption mention that you can just make out the gun, Hitler used (behind the 'S'), but that cannot be the case. Artur Axmann specifically states that he took custody of both weapons ['Hitlerjugend', p. 446]

► Eventually, they are seated in the velvet sofa; Adolf like an automaton; his flaccid face devoid of emotion as he prepares his weapon. Eva unscrews the little brass casing with the poisonous phial and places the tiny glass

bubble in her mouth. Her heart pounding, she looks at Adolf as he cocks the heavy Walter pistol. One last glance, then she bites down and feel the glass shatter. A short spasm jerks her young body; a brief sensation of suffocation and the last thing she hears is the echo of the pistol shot, reverberating in the tiny concrete coffin, then all is eternal silence.

▶ After about 10 to 15 minutes of waiting (time thus being approx. 15:45) the doors to the ante-room and subsequently to Hitler's living room are opened. The accounts vary a great deal here, as to who enters the rooms first. It is either Linge (his own account), Rattenhuber (historian Joachim Fest) or Bormann (historian James P. O'Donnell).

▶ As the entourage enters the room, the sight that meet them differs a great deal in detail, depending who you put your faith in. For details, see the individual accounts.

▶ According to one first-hand account [Kempka, p. 77], Dr. Stumpfegger examines the bodies and proclaim them dead. Kempka is *not* the most reliable of witnesses though, and this is not confirmed in other accounts.

▶ Adolf Hitler is now wrapped in a grey military blanket⁷ (by either Linge, Axmann or unknown SS soldiers, or a combination), so that the head is (at least partly) covered, and carried from room through room, the Conference Passageway and the rooms serving as quarter for the guards up the stairs of the Emergency Exit. The body is carried by Linge, assisted by RSD officers Högl, Reisser and Lindloff or Dr. Stumpfegger, or possibly by two unidentified 'SS Men'. In an interview with Joachimsthaler, Linge claimed to have carried Hitler by his feet, but in his own memoir he took the Führer by his shoulders.

▶ In almost all accounts, the dead Hitler's identity is verified (by witnesses who were not in the death room) by his well-known clothing; black trousers, black silk socks or black shoes, or a combination hereof being visible, the blanket being too short. Axmann and Misch, who saw the dead Führer in his study, confirm his attire. Kempka recalls that the blanket only covered Hitler's face "*as far as the bridge of his nose*".

▶ Eva Hitler is either wrapped (Linge's account) or not wrapped (O'Donnell et al) and carried the same route by Günsche > Bormann > Günsche (over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes), or by Erich Kempka (in his arms) > then Günsche again. In all accounts her face is visible.



Photo: The deceased Hitlers are carried up the emergency stairway to the Chancellery garden. Otto Günsche, carrying Eva, meets Kempka half way up. 'The Downfall'

The Viking funeral

Hitler had originally envisioned himself entombed in a lavish crypt at the birthplace of National Socialism. In his 1938 legally drafted will, he writes;

“Upon my death, my remains shall be transported to Munich... They shall be properly displayed on a catafalque before the Feldherrnhalle before the interment. After the state funeral, which is to be solemn, yet simple, my body is to be removed to the Temple of National Socialism on the Königsplatz. There I shall rest – under the eternal flame”

[O'Donnell, p. 243].

“History had it otherwise”

As it went, the ceremony *was* simple, but perhaps more grotesque than solemn, as loyal paladins hurriedly emptied cans of petrol, siphoned from the now redundant limousines, over the carcasses of the Führer and Führerin and then for a brief moment stood to attention at this bizarre bonfire before Russian grenades forced them back underground. Nor was the flame eternal; none of the faithful bothered to check on the funeral pyre, but left that to their minions, occupied as they were of the far more pressing business of their own survival:



Photo: Funeral pyre scene from 'The Downfall'.

- ▶ Both corpses are laid in a shell crater or a depression in the terrain (most accounts) or on flat, sandy ground (Joachimsthaler) 3-10 meters (10-30 feet) from the exit. According to Günsche's account, Bormann briefly removes the blanket from the face of the male corpse for a last glance.
- ▶ The corpses are doused with petrol, using anything from four to ten jerry-cans (80 to 200 liters \approx 20 to 50 gallons) by either Günsche alone (Mengershausen's account, observed from 60 meters away) or by several individuals, including unnamed SS Men. These may have been Günsche, Kempka and Linge, according to their accounts.
- ▶ The soaked corpses are ignited. This proves difficult because of a strong draft created by fires in the surrounding buildings, and the incessant

shelling; matches are tried (by Göbbels) and Günsche contemplates using a hand grenade, he has provided. At last ‘someone’ throws either a soaked, burning rag or a spoil of papers onto the corpses which immediately catches fire. This someone can be Bormann, Günsche, Kempka, Linge or Rattenhuber depending on which account you favor.⁸

- ▶ The mourners now stand to attention for a Berlin minute, giving the Hitler salute. Eventually the Russian barrage forces them to take cover in the Bunker.
- ▶ Accounts disagree even more when it comes to the burning. Hitler had implored a number of his most trusted followers to ensure, that there would be absolutely nothing left of his body after the burning. Yet it seems that they all have a fairly relaxed attitude to their promise and send junior officers to check on the progress rather than go there themselves.
- ▶ Finally, either at 23:00 or shortly after midnight, Rattenhuber is quoted to have ordered some of his soldiers to bury the remains, but it is not specify where. No attempt to secure ‘relics’ for posterity is made, nor does any of Hitler’s entourage show any interest in the funeral process.

“Shortly before midnight Mansfeld returned to duty in the (guards) tower. Russian shells were still falling, and the sky was illuminated by flares. He noticed that a bomb crater in front of the emergency exit had been newly worked upon, and that the bodies had disappeared. He did not doubt that the crater had been converted into a grave for them; for no shell could have piled the earth around it in so neat a rectangle. About the same time, Karnau⁹ was on parade with the other guards in the Vossstrasse, and one of his comrades said to him: “It is sad that none of the officers seems to worry about the Fuehrer’s body. I am proud that I alone know where it is”

[Trevor-Roper, p.182]

“The Wizard was dead. The spell had lifted!”

Freed from the spell of their Master; their Soldiers Oath – and more tangible; the threat of execution for defeatism – the Bunker dwellers began frantic preparations for the upcoming break-out [on the following night]. In spite of solemn promises, no one seemed to care much about the promised total destruction of Hitler’s body.

“From this moment nobody seems to have bothered about the past or the two corpses still sizzling in the garden”

[Trevor-Roper, p. 183]

It was not until 1956 that more substantial testimony about the burial procedure was available. Harry Mengershausen, RSD guard, returned from Russian imprisonment and told his story which he (allegedly) initially suppressed his interrogators, fearing that he may be counted amongst Hitler’s closest if he revealed the truth. Allegedly on order from Rattenhuber¹⁰ he and a detail of SS men placed the charred remains of the two bodies on a piece of tarpaulin and buried them in a nearby, somewhat deeper pothole.



Photo: The alleged place where the cremation took place. Sometimes described as a 'trench', but was actually part of some construction work. Interment occurred just a few meters away. Source: Unknown, but it appears to be Allied officers given a tour on the premises.

A pathetic little scene unfolded as one of the servicemen – apparently a fellow with some sense of dignity – tried to locate a Swastika flag to veil the remains of the dead Hitler. He found none and the German Führer, once the conqueror of most of Europe, found his last resting place amongst rubble and debris, wrapped in a torn piece of canvas.

Postscript



Photo: Part of the Vorbunker complex before demolition. Bundesarchiv.

Last man out of the Führerbunker was Johannes Hentschel, the chief technician. He had stayed behind – dutifully – to tend to the diesel generator that not only supplied electricity for the light and the artisan well, but also the pump that kept ground water at bay. Hentschel was eventually taken away by the Soviets on May 2, and, before he left, he managed to set the controls for the generator on ‘automatic’. Services could now continue for as long as there was fuel in the tank. As the diesel engine finally halted, lights went out, pumps stopped and slowly but surely, due to Berlin’s high water table, ground water began seeping into the Bunker.

When journalist and historian James P. O’Donnell made his way into the dungeon just weeks later [on July 4], water was already standing 3-4 inches high. At that time the Bunker was a mess, overflowing with all sorts of rubbish and apparently no-one ever gave it a thought to reestablish power in order for a thorough search and possible retrieve of effects. It is therefore a fair assumption that furniture and everything else simply perished as time went by. Above photo from the ‘Vorbunker’ clearly shows that the Führerbunker was eventually completely submerged. If you want a thorough account of the Bunker’s history, the ‘After The Battle’ magazine has devoted a whole issue [No. 61] to just that.

In the late 1980ties, a few years before the collapse of East Germany, a residential project was erected on the grounds of the Bunker [which, as a part of the ‘Death Strip’ had been neglected since the rise of the Wall]. In connection with that, the Führerbunker was allegedly¹¹ de-roofed [4,5 meters of reinforced concrete!] and the Bunker proper filled with dirt.

Today, a residential house occupies some of the space of the former New Reichs Chancellery and the area on top of the Führerbunker has given room to a kindergarten playground.

During extensive construction of residential housing and other buildings on the site, work crews uncovered several underground sections of the old bunker complex; for the most part these were destroyed. Other parts of the Chancellery underground complex were uncovered, but these were ignored, filled in, or resealed. [Wikipedia]

Suggested literature

Axmann, Artur: ‘**Hitlerjugend**’, © 1995, Müller Verlag

Baur, Hans: ‘**I was Hitler’s pilot**’, © 2013, Frontline

Below, Nicolaus von: ‘**At Hitler’s side**’, © 2001, Greenhill Books

Joachimsthaler, Anton: ‘**The Last Days of Hitler**’, © 1995, Cassell

Junge, Traudl: ‘**Until The Final Hour**’, © 2005, Phoenix

Kempka, Erich: ‘**I was Hitler’s chauffeur**’, © 2010, Frontline

Knappe, Siegfried: ‘**Soldat**’, © 1992, Dell Publishing

Linge, Heinz: ‘**With Hitler to the end**’, © 2009, Frontline

O’Donnell, James P.: ‘**The Bunker**’, © 1978, Da Capo Press

Trevor-Roper, Hugh: ‘**Last Days of Hitler**’, © 2002, Pan Books

- but there are many more: <https://bit.ly/3s4962K>

Notes

¹ British historian Hugh Trevor-Roper undertook the first investigation of Hitler's death. He presented his report, based on interviews with available witnesses, in the autumn of 1945 and used it as the basis for his 1946 book; 'The Last Days of Hitler'. The book has been updated as new witnesses were released from Soviet custody, but by and large the original investigation holds today.

² In 2009 I started out writing an investigative book on Hitler's demise in the Führerbunker. My motives was an annoyance over the outlandish speculations whether Adolf managed to make a last-minute escape and live a comfortable retirement life somewhere on this planet – or the Moon. Some years later the work ground to a halt, but his article – and plenty other from my hand – stem from this some 200 page manuscript.

³ In many books, even by renowned historians, you will see Hitler's liaison with Eva Braun described as 'one of the close guarded secrets of the Third Reich'. Yet it was no more a secret than Time Magazine was able to reveal the relationship as early as May 15th, 1939 [Axis History]

⁴ In fact, even though the red banner of victory did fly over the Reichstag before midnight of April 30, and Stalin's request thus was fulfilled, tenacious, ferocious fighting in the basement of the building carried on for another 24 hours.

⁵ This statement by Joachimsthaler seems hard to stomach, as Göbbels had been an eager proponent for Hitler to stay in the capital to the end.

⁶ British historian Robert Payne suggests that Hitler may have used a towel to muffle the shot: "*Probably, like Geli Raubal, Hitler had dulled the sound of the shot by wrapping the revolver in a towel*". Pure speculations on his part of course.

⁷ Payne has a surprising note here: "*There was just time enough for someone to take a flashbulb photograph of the dead Hitler, holding his mother's picture against his chest*". I believe that Payne, described by peers to have a tendency to 'incorporate speculation as fact', is pretty much alone in the world with that idea; at least I have been unable to find corroborative accounts. My best guess is that he confuses the photo of the dead 'double' in the Chancellery garden, taken by the Russians, with an intentional post mortem shot of the dead Führer. [The Life and Death of Adolf Hitler]

⁸ An intermezzo, omitted in most historians accounts, apparently unfolded moments after the bodies were set alight. Two civilians, climbing the wall from the adjacent garden of the Foreign Ministry and probably just seeking shelter from the barrage, were gunned down by the guards. It was their bad luck to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, as Hitlers orders had been that absolute secrecy should be maintained and no witnesses allowed. According to their papers, they were Poles, most likely POW or slave laborers and in a bizarre twist of fate, they perished just days before liberation was at hand.

The source of this information is Rochus Misch, quoting his comrade-in-arms Hans Hofbeck whom he encountered in a prison camp shortly after his capture. As with the Fegelein affair, Misch never revealed the identity of the shooter.

⁹ Erich Mansfeld and Hermann Karnau were members of Hitler's SS guard. They were interrogated by several historians when they returned from Russian captivity in 1955.

¹⁰ Postwar, Rattenhuber flatly denied issuing such an order.

¹¹ Not wanting to start any conspiracy theories here, I kinda find that claim hard to stomach. I mean; why bother? The damn thing was eight meters underground anyway, and four-and-a-half meter of ferro-concrete is not likely to give in whatever weight you put on top of it. Why not just shovel dirt on top of it and say that you have demolished it? My best guess is that the dungeon is still lurking down there, but then again ... who really cares; we shall never know anyway.