in Italy, now the focus of attention, there were insufficient local agents because of a long-standing prohibition on spying on their Axis partner. Canaris' record there was one of repeated failure.

The incident which brought about his downfall was almost an anticlimax. Von Ribbentrop complained to Hitler that Abwehr sabotage aboard British ships in Spanish harbours endangered his Spanish policy; as a result, on 8 February 1944, Hitler decreed that all such acts of sabotage had to cease. Three days later news came of an explosion in a British ship loaded with oranges in the port of Cartagena. Apparently Himmler's liaison at Führer headquarters, Hermann Fegelein, took advantage of Hitler's eruption of rage to suggest that the Abwehr simply be handed over in entirety to the Reichsführer-SS. Hitler nodded, sent for Himmler and commissioned him to form a unified intelligence service from the SD and Abwehr.[54] Thus it seems that it was von Ribbentrop who played the final card removing Canaris from the game; he did not do so on behalf of his arch-rival, but Himmler, who had protected the Admiral for so long against enemies within the RSHA, simply swept in the winnings.

Negotiations between Kaltenbrunner, 'Gestapo' Müller and Schellenberg on behalf of Himmler on the one hand and Keitel and Abwehr department chiefs on behalf of the OKW continued for weeks. Himmler compromised as he had throughout his career, giving up some purely military intelligence, counter-espionage and sabotage functions to OKW personnel for the sake of the major prize of assimilating virtually the entire existing Abwehr departments, outstations and personnel into a 'Military' Section VI of the RSHA under Schellenberg, who thus became chief of a vast unified Reich intelligence service. The final agreement was signed between Himmler and Keitel on 14 May 1944.

Canaris, after a period under virtual house arrest, was rehabilitated by Hitler in June, and appointed to head the OKW special staff for trade and economic warfare, a redundant office at this stage of the war. Why Hitler brought him back has been a puzzle to his biographers. Perhaps, once again, Himmler interceded for him; perhaps it was because his contacts with the west were felt to be still of value.

Thus as the situation of the Reich crumbled through the winter and spring 1943–4 and the opposition organisation spread wider and grew desperate for action before it was too late, Himmler mightily extended his own influence. At the same time the department chiefs of his most powerful organ, the RSHA, Ohlendorf and Schellenberg, were at one with the great industrialists, the conservative resistance and the Army opposition centred on the Bendlerstrasse in the realisation that a political solution had to be sought with the western allies. Himmler was equally clear about this. So for that matter was Hitler; it had been his aim from the beginning. Yet repeated soundings had shown that the west was not prepared to talk with him.

On the other hand it was plain that an Army attempt to seize

power was fraught with extraordinary difficulties: the comparatively small circle of officers in the know in key positions might be posted elsewhere before Day X; staffs and units were penetrated by indoctrinated National Socialist education officers; to initiate wider circles to prevent confusion when the putsch was launched invited exposure. Besides, a putsch by the Army alone, or units of the Army alone, must lead to civil war with the SS, security services and police on the side of those loyal to Hitler. It was evident that the SS had to take part in the change of regime. Since the SS was guardian of the ideological purity of the National Socialist state, this was the ultimate paradox – not perhaps to Himmler or Ohlendorf, who considered the Party corrupt, but a paradox and colossal danger for the opposition groupings. To a greater extent probably than at any time since the threatening SA 'revolution' of 1934, Himmler held the key to power in the Reich.

It appears there were four attempts to assassinate Hitler during this period:[55] on one occasion a bomb was smuggled aboard his plane before he flew, but the detonating mechanism failed. Whether the other three attempts aborted because of Hitler's habit of changing his schedules at the last moment in order to foil planned attempts, because of ill luck, or because Himmler learned about them and had Hitler change his itinerary is unclear.

All that seems certain is that there were manifold contacts and exchanges between Himmler's agents and the conservative and military opposition, between his agents and mediators with the west, between his chiefs in the Economics Ministry and RSHA and the secretly 'defeatist' financiers and industrialists, and that his industrial Circle of Friends contained many who were planning clandestinely with Ohlendorf for a post-war integration of the German economy with the west, and were still contributing large sums to his special SS account: in September 1943 1.1 million Marks went in, 200,000 of them from the banker von Schröder himself; as he wrote to Himmler, 'we are very happy to be able to perform a certain help in your special tasks.'[56] At the same time all the leading members of the opposition were kept under close surveillance by the SD and Gestapo and were acutely aware of it. On both sides it was an intricately hazardous game. Himmler sat in his field headquarters, one imagines, with a Sphinx-like gaze behind the pince-nez.

At the same time he was bending every effort to ensure that the Reich could hold out: he urged Pohl to build factories for the production of war materials in natural caves and underground tunnels immune to enemy bombing, and instructed him to hollow out workshop and factory space in all SS stone quarries, suggesting that by the summer of 1944 they should have 'new cavemen' installed in the greatest possible number of such 'uniquely bomb-proof work sites'. The plans to use natural caves came up against the usual rivalries from competing authorities with the same idea. Nevertheless Pohl's Works' Department chief, Brigadeführer

Hans Kammler, succeeded in creating underground workshops and living quarters from a cave system in the Harz mountains in central Germany in what Speer, writing to congratulate him, called 'an almost impossibly short period of two months' – a feat, he continued, 'unsurpassable even by American standards'.[57] This complex, known as 'Dora', was to take over from Buchenwald the secret production of parts for the A4 or V – 'Vegeltungs' (Retaliation) – rockets for which Himmler had assumed responsibility in the summer. The urgency with which this programme was pressed forward was, of course, fully in line with the desire for negotiations with the west, designed as it was to force them to the negotiating table.

Kammler, whom Speer described as making 'an extremely fresh, energetic and ruthless impression – comparable to Heydrich's', went on to build further underground factories at a similarly astonishing speed and with the expenditure of thousands of slave labourers, many of them Jews from Hungary.

Thus far the Hungarian government, like the Italian government previously, had preserved its Jews from the extermination machine, but in March 1944 Hitler ordered the military occupation of the country to prevent its defection from the Axis, and Eichmann went in the next day with a Sondereinsatzkommando to seize able-bodied Jews for labour, the rest for annihilation before the Red Army should overrun the death camps in the General Gouvernement. All those not selected for labour were sent to Auschwitz in May, where as Höss recorded they were despatched at a speed not attained hitherto, 'something over 9000' every twenty-four hours, taken from overcrowded incoming transports, gassed and burned in the crematoria.[58]

The extermination of Hungarian Jewry coincided with a bizarre proposal to trade them with the west in return for merchandise and foreign exchange. Eichmann, at his interrogation in 1960, said that, so far as he remembered, the scheme originated with Himmler.[59] It is equally possible it originated in Schellenberg's fertile mind, either to put Himmler in a better light with the western allies, as Kersten seems to suggest in his diary notes for June[60] – at which date he was treating Schellenberg as well as Himmler – or to probe and exacerbate the tensions between the western allies and the Russians. The choice of location for the negotiation tends to support Schellenberg's involvement; it was Turkey, where he and von Ribbentrop had or believed they might have acquired an agent, codenamed 'Cicero', with access to the most secret despatches of the British Ambassador at Ankara, Sir Hughe Montgomery Knatchbull-Hugessen. It is probable, if not certain, that 'Cicero' was actually controlled by the British secret service. While 'Cicero' resigned from Sir Hughe's service towards the end of April the plan, co-ordinated with the secret Zionist organisation Vaadah, must have been hatching before this was known.

A Hungarian Jew named Uyell Brandt, travelling on a German passport

as Eugen Brandt in a German plane, and accompanied by a Gestapo agent, arrived in Istanbul on 19 May claiming to represent Hungarian Jewry, and reporting to the Jewish and allied authorities that the Germans were prepared to evacuate a million Jews to Spain and Portugal in return for 10,000 motor lorries – for use on the Russian front only – and certain other commodities or foreign exchange; failing an agreement all Jews remaining in Hungary, Rumania, Czechoslovakia and Poland would be annihilated.[61] The offer was regarded with extreme suspicion. In Washington it was felt that Eichmann and possibly Himmler might be seeking to obtain foreign currency for their own use after Germany's defeat; in London it was regarded as a 'sheer case of blackmail or political warfare', designed to embroil the UK and US governments with the Soviet government 'by representing to the latter that the former were negotiating with the enemy'.[62] The Russians were informed immediately and replied that any parley with Hitlerite Germany was inadmissible; nevertheless, the British and Americans kept the negotiations open, playing for time for several months. In fact it could scarcely have been a genuine offer since, as Höss recorded, this period in the summer of 1944 saw Auschwitz's highest ever daily figures for annihilation, while all able-bodied Jews were employed building underground factories or in other concentration camp work.

This last phase of Nazi power in Europe saw the logic of the *Weltanschauung* reach its apotheosis. The oil of the Caucasus, the minerals and industries of the Donetz basin, the fertile agricultural lands of the Ukraine, eastern *Lebensraum*, all the ostensible targets of Hitler's assault, had been lost during the Soviet advances of the winter and spring, together with almost a million German and Axis troops; four out of thirteen German armies in the east had been smashed, another virtually annihilated in the Crimea and forced to evacuate by sea. A Russian thrust deep into the Bukovina region of northern Rumania had split the defence of the southern area; intelligence experts of Foreign Armies East predicted a continuing Russian advance without pause from this salient north-westerly into the southern flank of Army Group Centre, the last bastion of German strength in the east. In the west Rommel awaited the Anglo-American invasion forces massed in the southern counties of England. The transport systems of France and the industrial regions of Germany were under constant allied air attack.

The seriousness of the position was clear from Hitler's appearance; shocked visitors to the Wolfschanze or the Berghof saw 'an old, stooping man with an unhealthy, puffy face',[63] whose left leg, arm and hand shook uncontrollably. Yet, sustained by will – or amphetamines – and his most loyal inner circle, Bormann, Himmler, Goebbels, Dönitz and Speer, he saw the turning point in his fortunes within grasp: a rush programme of new jet fighters, the 'Vergeltung' rockets, new U-boats with unprecedented underwater speed would prevent or defeat the allied invasion and allow him to transfer his western armies east for the decisive battle to break the

'exhausted' Russians. This was the phantom shimmering in the close air at Führer headquarters. Of all those who helped create and uphold it Himmler and Speer were the key figures since they were entrusted with production of the necessary 'miracle' weapons.

The other phantom there had a long, narrow skull, blue eyes in the visage of a warrior; purged of the blood of inferior races this pure Aryan German could endure all that fate hurled at him and emerge victorious by virtue of his innate qualities. Here Himmler was the key figure, the *Endlösung* the talisman and proof.

'Of this you can be sure,' he told a gathering of generals and members of the Führer headquarters staff in early May 1944,[64] 'had we not eliminated the Jews from Germany we would not have been able to endure the bombing despite the decency of the German *Volk*. That is my conviction.' And he reminded them of Hitler's prophecy before the war that if the European nations were incited into another world war, it would not be the German peoples who were exterminated, but the Jews. Then he repeated the claim he had made to the Gauleiters in Posen the previous October:

> The Jewish question in Germany and the occupied countries has been solved. It has been solved in accordance with the struggle for survival of our *Volk*, in which the survival of our blood was at stake, without compromise. I tell you that as comrades. We are all soldiers, whatever uniform we wear. You might like to sympathise with me and imagine how hard it was to fulfil this soldierly order that was given me which I followed and carried through out of obedience and the most complete conviction. If you say, 'The men – that we understand – but not the children,' then may I draw your attention to my earlier remarks. In this showdown with Asia we must accustom ourselves to the groundrules and consign to oblivion the morals of past European wars which are dear and much closer to us. We are, in my opinion, even as Germans with all our deep heartfelt good-natured feeling, not justified in allowing the hate-filled avengers to grow up so that our children and grandchildren have to settle with them because we, the fathers or grandfathers, were too weak and too cowardly and left the children for them.

His use before these generals and members of the Führer headquarters staff of the phrase 'this soldierly order that was given me' is surely crucial in reinforcing the truth of his claims on other occasions that he had been ordered to eliminate the Jews by the Supreme Commander, the Führer.

Later that month he spoke again to a group of generals, repeating his words about the Jewish question having been solved according to order without compromise. This time a record of the speech reveals that the words were greeted with applause,[65] another clue to the wide circle of agreement about the purpose and ends of Jewish policy. It was the Army which had been to a large extent responsible for calling forth the Party in the first place; it seems that the *Weltanschauung* was a more faithful

reflection of their desires than they were afterwards prepared to admit; Himmler was, as he had always been, the extreme conformist.

'I believe, *meine Herren*,' he went on, 'you know me well enough to realise I am no bloodthirsty fellow [*blutrünstiger Mensch*], and not one to take pleasure or amusement in whatever tough thing I have to do. On the other hand, however, I have such good nerves and such a large sense of duty – that I may lay claim to for myself – that, when I recognise something as necessary, I carry it out without compromise.'[66] And he repeated his earlier remarks that it would have been cowardice not to have dealt with the women and children, only to allow them to grow up to take their revenge on their own sons and grandsons.

The following month and before yet another audience of generals, he repeated his claim to having solved the Jewish question without compromise. Had he not done so, had there been Jews in the cities, the German people could not have endured the bombing terror – 'which in the last analysis is organised by the Jews'.[67]

These speeches are curious in their mixture of bravado, self-justification and appeals for understanding about the nature of the task he had been ordered to perform, the courage and hardness required to do away with women and children. His motives for revealing the fact of extermination outside Party circles little more than six months after telling the Gauleiters it was a secret they should take with them to the grave must remain speculative. As with his revelations to the Gauleiters, it may have been to draw the generals into complicity and show them that their bridges were burned. It may simply have been an expression of the radicalism called forth by the desperate situation, intended to bolster morale: now that the Jewish problem had been solved, the cleansed Reich would overcome its other enemies. It may have been a genuine expression of pride in what he had achieved in the face of enormous moral and practical difficulties. Perhaps it also arose from a subconscious longing to rationalise what he knew to have been a crime of historic dimension – and given his devout Catholic upbringing can it be doubted that deep within, entombed by reinforced structures of dogma and reason, but quickening and twisting in the night, was a core of primal, childlike understanding that he had sinned, sinned in the sight of the Lord.

Whatever the mix of motives, the speeches are true reflections of the way in which the ultimate crisis for Nazi power saw the ultimate expression of the *Weltanschauung* and of the urges underlying the whole drive to power and conquest, the Freikorps' urge to war and destruction, the Freikorps' fantasy of women, the pure and chaste of their dreams, and on the other hand the aggressively sexual 'red women' – Jewesses – to be raped and murdered to conquer the softer feminine side within and render the world safe, clean and masculine again. And so the gas chamber–crematoria complexes at Auschwitz reached peak capacity that summer, and at the same time the numbers of *Untermenschen* working and dying as slaves for the master race

rose prodigiously. These Dantesque mills of death also managed to reflect the chaos of competing authorities institutionalised both in the Reich and in Himmler's empire. Höss, who had been transferred from Auschwitz to the Concentration Camp Inspectorate under Glücks, and was thus in a position to see the full picture, wrote of this period in his memoirs:

> The harder the war became the more ruthlessly the Reichsführer-SS demanded the employment of prisoners. . . . Chiefly they were sacrificed for armaments. The concentration camps stood between the RSHA [of Kaltenbrunner] and the WVHA [of Pohl]. The RSHA delivered prisoners with the goal of extermination; whether immediately through execution or by the gas chambers or whether somewhat more slowly through epidemics (brought about through the indefensible conditions in the concentration camps which one purposely did not want to improve) made no difference. The WVHA wanted the prisoners preserved for armaments [work]. Because however Pohl allowed himself to be discouraged by the Reichsführer–SS, demanding continually higher work numbers, he gave unintentional support to the purposes of the RSHA, in that his pressure to fulfil the demands meant that countless thousands of prisoners had to die, because in practice all the necessary living conditions for such masses of prisoners were lacking. At the time I suspected this connection but could not and did not wish to believe it. Today however I see the picture more precisely. That and nothing other was the real background, the great shadow that stood behind the concentration camps.[68]

The pressure exerted on the concentration camp Kommandants by Himmler through Pohl extended beyond numbers of prisoners, to their hours of work. Thus at the end of April 1944, Pohl issued an instruction that 'work must be, in the true sense of the word, exhausting in order to obtain maximum output. . . . The hours of work are not limited. The duration depends on the technical structure of the camp and the work to be done and is determined by the camp Kommandant alone.'[69] This hints at the irrational. The previous month Albert Speer had placed workers engaged in fighter aircraft production on a seventy-two-hour week. It soon became apparent that this carried the danger of lower performance through increased sickness, nervous strain and difficulties at home.[70] By advocating working prisoners literally to exhaustion and without adequate hygiene or food, Pohl wrote them off as an expendable material; he must have done so moreover – since he was not a fool – without real expectation of increased productivity. Thus it seems that the great armaments and 'miracle weapons' programmes designed ostensibly to meet the military crisis were another expression of the urge to destroy and kill. It is small wonder that, according to Albert Speer's calculations, each concentration camp worker produced between one-sixth and one-seventh the output of a normal worker in a private factory.

Degraded, undernourished and terrorised as were the prisoners who worked in Siemens' electrical factories, IG Farben's synthetic plants, on

the assembly lines of the armaments and aircraft magnates, or in the camps' own factories and workshops, those employed in the underground complexes suffered even more abject conditions of slavery. Speer, who in his post-war accounts attempted to distance himself from the horrors he had been a party to, admitted he had been told by the Chief Physician of the Todt Organisation after an inspection of the V-weapon factories in the Harz mountains that he had seen Dante's Inferno.[71] He himself described 'expressionless faces, dull eyes in which not even hatred was discernible, exhausted bodies in dirty, blue-grey trousers'. The air in the cave was 'cool, damp and stank of excrement. The lack of oxygen made me dizzy. . . .' He was reminded of a visit he had made to the caves of Syracuse dug out thousands of years before by Greek prisoners of war; the scenes he saw here were more terrible than those he had pictured in his imagination then.[72]

For a prisoner's view, here is Dr Alfred Balochowsky, a Russian-born, naturalised Frenchman arrested in France in July 1943, who arrived at Dora, the Harz cave complex, via Buchenwald camp, in February 1944:[73] 'After our arrival, we spent a whole day and night without food in the cold, in the snow, waiting for all the formalities of registration in the camp. . . . ' They found that their block leaders were criminals convicted by German courts before the war, who had been consigned to concentration camps for life after completing their prison sentences. They had no hope of ever getting out. They were distinguished by the criminal's green triangular badge with a black 'S' for 'Security organisation' (*Sicherheitsverband*) superimposed.

> These criminals, however, thanks to the support and co-operation they were offered by the SS management of the camp, now had the chance of a career. This career consisted in stealing from and robbing the other prisoners, and obtaining from them the maximum output demanded by the SS. They beat us from morning till night.
>
> We got up at four o'clock in the morning and had to be ready within five minutes in the underground dormitories where we were crammed, without ventilation, in foul air, in blocks . . . into which 3000 to 3500 internees were crowded. There were five tiers of bunks with rotting straw mattresses. Fresh ones were never issued. We were given five minutes in which to get up, for we went to bed completely dressed. We were hardly able to get any sleep, for there was a continuous coming and going, and all sorts of thefts took place among the prisoners. Furthermore, it was impossible to sleep because we were covered with lice; the whole Dora camp swarmed with vermin. It was virtually impossible to get rid of the lice. In five minutes we had to be in line in the tunnel and march to a given place.

For these deathly pale, overtaxed, filthy and verminous moving skeletons the only inducements to work and obedience were the blows of their criminal overseers and summary executions with the bodies left dangling in the tunnels as a warning.

Himmler explained the Kapo system in the camps as a whole to the generals in his June speech. These approximately 40,000 German political and professional criminals were – he asked them not to laugh – his *Unteroffizier* corps for the whole camp community. Laughter. Each Kapo was responsible for seeing that his thirty, forty or one hundred prisoners performed their work, committed no sabotage, were clean and left their beds tidy; it could not be more orderly in a recruits' barracks. 'He must also drive his men,' he continued. 'The moment we are not satisfied with him, he is no longer a Kapo, he sleeps among the men [of his block] again. That they will kill him in the first night – that he knows. The Kapo is given certain privileges. I have not – I may say this in all plainness – to devise a welfare system here, but I have to bring in the *Untermenschen* from the streets and set them to work for Germany – for victory.'[74]

About the time Balochowsky was accustoming himself to the regime at Dora, Himmler requested his manager of the Lebensborn homes, Max Sollman, to open a file on the 'Question of procreation of girls or boys', and dictated a note to open it: Berger had told him of an old custom practised in his native Swabian Alps by parents wanting a male child. Both husband and wife took no alcohol for a week during which the wife fed herself well and did no work or anything causing strain; after this the husband left home at twelve noon and walked to Ulm, twenty kilometres distant, and back without stopping at an inn. 'After the return of the man from his route-march, procreation took place. The result was always supposed to be the birth of a son.'[75]

Himmler may have been led to reflect on the question by the continuing heavy losses in the east, or by his own prospect of becoming a father again. Häschen was four months pregnant.

Meanwhile through the spring and early summer Ohlendorf's reports on the mood of the population sounded ever more pessimistic. Shortages of accommodation in the cities due to the destruction wrought by bombing caused concern, as did shortages of clothes and vegetables – especially root crops like carrots and turnips due to the absence of labour for planting – but overshadowing everything were the twin questions of the terror air-raids and the impending allied invasion. In early May 'increasing nervousness among the women due to the continuing [air] alarm' was reported yet again. Mothers were spending night after night in the shelters. '"Where is our defence?" is an ever-repeated question.' Things could not continue in this way for much longer, it was felt; the pressure was building up to some violent discharge.[76]

The next report placed the invasion at the centre-point of all conversation. Was it coming or wasn't it? Between this and the air terror the population was under great strain: things quite simply could not continue as they were. By 1 June, 'deep attacks' by enemy planes strafing individuals in the roads and workers in the fields were causing as much stress as the continuous bombing.

14

The Plot against Hitler

The SD reports conveyed an impression of imminent collapse in civilian morale. In Switzerland Allen Dulles of the OSS was gaining a similar picture of demoralisation in the German foreign service through secret diplomatic and military documents brought to him by a clerk in the Foreign Ministry, Berlin, named Fritz Kolbe – codename 'George Wood'.[1] Dulles was also receiving reports of the opposition plans for an assassination of Hitler and an Army take-over of power, together with the familiar enquiries about the terms on which the western allies would be prepared to negotiate peace or an armistice with the new government. Roosevelt would not move from the publicly stated three-power position of unconditional surrender and no separate peace. Like the siblings Scholl of the White Rose, Fritz Kolbe stands out from the men of affairs and intellectuals and the new military converts to opposition by the apparently splendid simplicity of his motives. Working entirely alone, he was impelled by the conviction that only total military defeat would remove the Nazis from power. A large part of the opposition, however – especially the newer converts – was as 'realist' in its motivation and as crass in its assessment of the outside view of Germany as the regime itself. They believed that if they succeeded in removing Hitler and forming a new government Germany could become an acceptable negotiating partner and they might play on western fears of the Bolshevisation of Europe to obtain:

> an honourable peace without occupation, without ceding territory or war contributions, without political encirclement and economic fetters. If need be the cession of East Prussia could be considered as compensation to Poland as well as a declaration of the independence of Austria.
>
> Opposed to such a view there is only the English mentality which regards Germany as incorrigibly aggressive. In reality it was only the peace of Versailles which called forth ideas of aggression. . . .[2]

This propaganda pamphlet found in the effects of one of the conspirators, Ulrich-Wilhelm Graf Schwerin von Schwanenfeld, a liaison between the military and civilian opposition groupings, might have been written by Schellenberg, Ohlendorf or a member of Goebbels' office. Leaving out the Kreisau Circle and other religious groupings and individuals like Oster and

Goerdeler, who had been aware from the beginning of the moral dimension to the struggle, the military men and politicians of the opposition who sought at the eleventh hour to save the Fatherland from inglorious defeat and the subsequent partition and occupation promised by their enemies, held the same view of power-political realities and intended the same political solution as Hitler and Himmler while, like resistance historians since, speaking of honour.

Like Himmler, von Stauffenberg could not believe that the English at least did not understand the imminent danger of a Bolshevik Europe. But nor, apparently, did he understand the weakness of Germany's bargaining position. Towards the end of May he proposed conditions for an armistice in the west: on the allied side an immediate cessation of the air war, renunciation of invasion plans and the avoidance of further sacrifice of lives, on the German side a new free government which would evacuate all occupied areas in north, west and south, leaving 'permanent defence capability in the east' along the 1914 borders, retaining Austria and the Sudeten area, and gaining a part of the Tyrol. These ideas were virtually the same as Schellenberg's – if his memoirs are to be believed – and von Stauffenberg's final proposals were in line with Ohlendorf's: 'energetic reconstruction with co-operation in the reconstruction of Europe, self-settlement with the criminals in the *Volk*' (the present regime presumably): 'regaining honour, self-respect and esteem'.[3]

Had it been stalemate, such terms – which von Stauffenberg told Goerdeler would be on Churchill's desk in about eight days – might have been 'realist': with Germany's military, diplomatic, economic, manpower, moral and morale position eroding it was self-delusion. It was probably a delusion to believe that the Nazi regime could be replaced by a new 'free government' in any case.

As for the British they were as sceptical about the approaches of the new opposition as they had been of the old: they had every reason to believe the German nation incorrigibly militaristic, nationalistic, mediaeval in its savagery. Von Stauffenberg and his colleagues should not be blamed for failing to perceive this since they had been subject for years to propaganda and could equate the allied bombing and strafing of civilians, women and children, with German crime in the east. Moreover post-war German historians of the resistance also – and with far less excuse – overlook the odium which surrounded the very name of Germany. The British and Americans were determined not to repeat the mistakes of Versailles: the German nation was to be divided so that it could never again support militarism or have the industrial capacity to sustain aggression. Since the allies were in a position to achieve this their posture was as 'real' as von Stauffenberg's was 'unreal'. Moreover the proposals from the opposition did not differ greatly from Himmler's proposals, and were frequently conveyed via the same channels; the Swedish bankers Jacob and Markus Wallenberg, Himmler's curious friend Langbehn, his Freundeskreis colleague Karl

Rasche, and others whose ultimate allegiance was obscure. Everyone in the higher positions in Germany right up to Goebbels and Hitler was aware that a political solution had to be found and – since the vast majority was anti-communist – had to be found with the west. There was no reason for the allies to believe that the new government promised by von Stauffenberg would be more than a cosmetic exercise to give military nationalists, bankers and industrialists time to reconstruct.

At some time towards the end of May or beginning of June the Inspector of Armoured Troops, General Guderian, talked to Himmler about the need to replace staff officers who had been too long away from the front and were slow in coming to decisions. This included the Chief of Staff to the head of the Replacement Army, General Friedrich Fromm, and he suggested that Himmler bring this to Hitler's attention. Himmler asked whom he proposed as the new Chief of Staff: von Stauffenberg was the best horse in the stable, Guderian replied. Himmler agreed immediately – so the Minister of Finance, Schwerin von Krosigk, recalled in his memoirs.[4]

If correct, this was a significant conversation, for as Chief of Staff von Stauffenberg would have personal access to Hitler, and it is difficult to believe that Himmler was not aware by this date, eight months after von Stauffenberg's appointment to the Bendlerstrasse, that he was the new dynamo of the military opposition. It is equally difficult to believe that Guderian did not know. He had been approached by the opposition the previous year and had declined to join them, yet like the other generals he despaired of Hitler's strategy of trying to hold every yard of ground in the east, and his true position can best be described as enigmatic; he would have welcomed a military take-over if it could be accomplished without civil war. Fromm, who naturally had a say in the appointment of his own Chief of Staff, had been initiated into the opposition the previous year. He condoned rather than actively supported it, and was described by one member of the conspiracy as a man who would act in the uprising when he saw that it had succeeded.[5] He evidently agreed to von Stauffenberg's appointment; it was to begin on 15 June, officially on 1 July.

The picture which suggests itself is of these three opaque characters, Himmler, Guderian and Fromm, all aware of the need for Hitler's removal, and aware of von Stauffenberg's burning desire to accomplish it, agreeing tacitly and without revealing their motives or feelings to one another, to give the young Colonel his head. Whether or not this or the conversation recorded by von Krosigk occurred, it is a useful illustration of the reality behind events: there was a consensus for change, but the system was frozen in place by terror; even Himmler, master of terror, was frozen by that side of his emotional nature which needed to give loyalty to a creed and a strong master and that side of his rational nature that hesitated to come down on one side or the other while there was a chance of waiting to take advantage of events. So he and the military tiptoed around each other, waiting and hoping for the catalyst, von Stauffenberg.

In Himmler's files there is a message from January 1944 that can be construed as confirmation that he knew about the new centre of military opposition in the Bendlerstrasse building; yet it tantalises by its incompleteness and omission of names. It is a 'strictly confidential', 'immediate' wire to Himmler from the Ministerial Director at the Propaganda Ministry, SS-Brigadeführer Dr Werner Naumann: 'The General whom you mentioned to me recently laid before Generaloberst Fromm on 13 December 1943 a report on his measures after the serious air attacks on Berlin which came into my hands by chance today. . . .'[6] Naumann quoted a part of this report which pointed out that the military command (Generalkommando) had not made use of 'command over all the power-resources of the state, the Party and its affiliations' since co-operation with the Gauleiter of Berlin (Goebbels) as Commissioner for Reich Defence was conceived to be the best solution, 'and all measures were agreed in daily consultation with the Gauleiter'. Naumann had laid this report before his Minister, Goebbels, who had sent for General Fromm immediately,

> and pointed out to him in unmistakable style that the ideas of the named General about the command structure after a 'catastrophe' in Berlin were downright 'fantastic'. He requested Fromm instantly to point out to the named General and in addition to all the commanders of the Generalkommando, that we are not living in the Kaiser's Germany, but in a National Socialist *Führungs*-state and that the Party would never give up its claim to control.
>
> Generaloberst Fromm took notice of this statement and gave his assurance that this opinion had come into being without his knowledge and against his orders. He would see that the General concerned was instructed over the actual [command] relationship at once.

Naumann ended his wire by stating that his Minister would now take special interest in the command regulations after an air attack on Berlin; 'He has commissioned me, esteemed Reichsführer, to bring this to your notice.'

Obviously 'the named General' came under Fromm as Chief of Army Armaments and Commander of the Replacement (or Home) Army. The most likely candidates seem to be Major-General Hellmuth Stieff, Chief of the Organisation Department of Fromm's command and an early collaborator with von Stauffenberg, or Lieutenant-General Paul von Hase, the commander of Berlin, also in the conspiracy; it is unlikely that von Stauffenberg's immediate superior, General of Infantry Friedrich Olbricht, would have prepared a report on measures taken after the Berlin air-raids, although it is by no means impossible. Nevertheless it is evident that Himmler had his eye on at least one of these senior staff officers, and the overwhelming probability is that he was fully aware of the nest of conspirators there.

*

Schellenberg's unified intelligence service was no more successful than Canaris' Abwehr in penetrating the bluffs and double bluffs of western deception. When General Eisenhower launched the invasion armada for the coast of Normandy in the early hours of 6 June 1944 the allies achieved complete strategic and tactical surprise. Dönitz, whose U-boats and special small craft were supposed to play a key – and suicidal – role in the critical initial stages while the troops were being landed, was on holiday with his family in the Black Forest. Rommel, commanding Army Group B on the Channel and North Sea coasts, was at home on his way to report to Hitler at the Berghof. The OKW staff thought the landings probably a feint and did not rouse Hitler. It appears that the naval staff were first to recognise the situation for what it was; by 11.15 a.m. when Dönitz arrived back at the headquarters camp outside Berlin known as Koralle, there was no doubt that, as it was expressed in the war diary, 'the war has entered its final stage for Germany.'[7]

The troops landed under cover of a massive naval bombardment and overwhelming air superiority. The short supply route between the Isle of Wight and the assault beaches was protected by such naval and air strength that Dönitz's forces had no chance of entering the corridor let alone hindering the build-up of troops, armour, ammunition and supplies. By 10 June Dönitz's staff conceded that the allies were established ashore; 'the second front is at hand.'[8]

In the German population, and no doubt in the armed forces, news of the invasion came as a sudden break in the tension. The SD public opinion report likened it to 'a cleansing thunderstorm'. Most people, it suggested, received the news 'with satisfaction and pleasure'; 'positive circles' were convinced 'that we will be able to expel the enemy who have landed and they see in this the possibility of winning the war.'[9] The following week came news that the secret rockets had been launched against London and southern England. 'I give you wonderful news,' said one Party comrade to a colleague, recorded in the opinion report. 'The retaliation is under way!' ('Die Vergeltung geht los!'). Another compared the rocket attack on the south of England to the snapping shut of a mousetrap; another expected the war to be over by Christmas.[10] There is a note of hysteria in these wild surges of public opinion and by the end of the month, predictably, the mood had swung right down again. The causes were listed in the SD report of 28 June as disappointment after the exaggerated hopes placed both in the V-1s and in the prospect of throwing the Normandy invasion forces back into the sea, the successful start of the Russian summer offensive and continuing heavy air attacks over the Reich.[11]

Pessimism was even deeper among the generals, extending, according to one account, to Hitler's highest staff officer, Keitel. Rommel and the Supreme Commander, West, Field Marshal von Rundstedt, travelled to the Berghof on the 29th intending to put the true facts before Hitler, but were not invited to eat with him and at the evening situation conference they were

silenced by a monologue on the 'overall position' and new 'miracle weapons' which would bring about a sudden turn of events such as had occurred on the death of the Tsarina in the Seven Years War. The deployment of these weapons, Hitler said, would herald 'final total victory'.[12] Afterwards Rommel told Keitel that Hitler was living in a fantasy world; to talk of total victory was absurd: total defeat faced them and the only way to maintain the front in the east and prevent chaos in the Reich and further destruction from the air was to end the war in the west immediately. Keitel promised he would put this to Hitler, then said in a resigned tone, 'I know there is nothing to be done.'[13]

Hitler attempted to stem the defeatism in the High Command in France by replacing von Rundstedt not with Rommel – the expected choice – but with von Kluge, and the commander of the Seventh Army in the Cherbourg sector of Rommel's Army Group B – who had suffered a heart attack – by the commander of II SS-Panzerkorps, Himmler's veteran Verfügungstruppe chief, now Oberstgruppenführer Paul Hausser. He also repeated his eastern strategy of demanding that every fortress, every yard of ground be held to the last man. When the commander of Panzer Group West complained of this static concept, which handed the initiative to the enemy, Hitler accused him of defeatism and replaced him.

Von Kluge, who came to France in a positive frame of mind after an extended briefing at Führer headquarters, was converted within days: a tour of the fronts showed him that his predecessor and Rommel were right and that Hitler was lost in wishful thinking. At Rommel's headquarters on 9 July, he saw Lieutenant-Colonel of the Reserve Dr Casar von Hofacker, from the economic staff of the military governor of Paris, General Karl von Stülpnagel (not to be confused with the former Military Governor of France, Otto von Stülpnagel). Von Hofacker was a cousin of von Stauffenberg and acted as Paris liaison with the Bendlerstrasse conspirators; he was chief adviser to von Stülpnagel, also a committed member of the opposition. He brought with him a memorandum stressing the urgent need for ending the war in the west, if necessary by independent action of the military command in France, and asked von Kluge how long the invasion front could be held. 'Maximum fourteen days to three weeks,' the Field Marshal replied, 'then a breakthrough is to be expected. We have nothing to oppose it.'[14]

Von Hofacker reported back to the centre of the conspiracy in Berlin, where his account of von Kluge's change of heart made a great impression, instilling von Stauffenberg with a sense of renewed urgency. Although the reports from his western contacts were negative about the chances of separate negotiations, he must have drawn encouragement from remarks by Churchill's deputy, Clement Attlee, in the House of Commons on 6 July. Should any section of the German people wish to see a return to a regime based on respect for international law and the rights of the individual, Attlee had said in obvious reference to the opposition groupings, 'they must understand that no one will believe them

until they have taken active steps to rid themselves of their present regime.' This, of course, had been the official British attitude since before the war. 'The longer they continue to support and to tolerate their present rulers,' Attlee had continued, 'the heavier grows their own direct responsibility for the destruction that is being wrought throughout the world, and not least in their own country.'[15] The clear hint was endorsed by Churchill himself in the House of Commons on 12 July.

On the same date, perhaps by coincidence, perhaps as a result of personal contacts with the allies across a local armistice line while exchanging badly wounded allied prisoners for German nursing and communications personnel captured in Cherbourg,[16] von Kluge consented to Rommel sounding out the army and corps commanders about their attitude in the event of a military take-over for a separate peace in France. Von Kluge's own attitude was that he was ready to place himself at the disposal of the leaders of the military putsch if Hitler were removed, but beyond that he would not go. By the 15th Rommel had received similar assurances from all his senior officers, including the two most senior Waffen-SS commanders, Oberstgruppenführer Paul Hausser, commanding the Seventh Army, and Sepp Dietrich, commanding the I SS-Panzerkorps.[17] That the commander of Hitler's original elite formation of guards, the Leibstandarte, was apparently prepared to co-operate with the Reaktion in supporting a change of regime is remarkable testimony to the seriousness of the military situation as viewed from France. It is inconceivable that Himmler was not fully informed. According to Stroop, who had good reason to know, he was also fully informed of von Kluge's attitude since he had 'a dependable informant among the most intimate of von Kluge's staff officers'.[18]

Meanwhile in the east the Red Army was on the move in all sectors; Army Group North was in danger of encirclement as the enemy broke through towards the Gulf of Riga and the borders of east Prussia; Army Group Centre had been shattered, losing the greater part of two armies and a Panzerkorps; in the Ukraine a Soviet offensive had been launched for Lvov near the borders of the Protectorate. Fuel shortages and the demands of the western front were hampering German air defence, and the position was aggravated by mounting partisan activity. In both Poland and Slovakia risings against the German occupiers were being planned by nationalist and communist underground forces to take advantage of the approach of the Russian armies.

By rational calculation the war was lost. The opposition might hope that by removing Hitler they could split the enemy coalition and save the Fatherland. Hitler was probably more realistic in thinking it 'childish and naive to expect that at a time of grave military defeat the moment for favourable political action has come. Such moments come when you are having success.'[19] Still clutching desperately at the coming 'miracle weapons' to preserve his own and his paladins' and his people's confidence amid the defeatism and treachery he sensed everywhere, continuing his

static defensive strategy of holding every position to the last, he entrusted Himmler with the task of creating fifteen new divisions to stop the gaps torn in Army Group Centre.

Under normal circumstances these new divisions would have been the responsibility of the Bendlerstrasse headquarters of the Replacement Army; so it came about that von Stauffenberg, as Fromm's Chief of Staff, became involved in a common task with Himmler, and on 15 July he flew to the Wolfschanze to take part in a conference on the subject. Himmler also travelled to the Wolfschanze that day. Von Stauffenberg had accompanied Fromm to a number of Führer conferences at the Berghof earlier in the month and it was suggested in subsequent Gestapo reports that he had carried explosives with him but had failed to set them off because Göring and Himmler were absent.[20] The evidence about this 15 July visit is scant and conflicting but it seems that he had the explosives with him again, or they were carried by one of his party, and he told his escorting adjutant, Captain Klausing, that he would 'possibly' make the attempt.[21]

While he was still in the air and some two hours before the conference was due to begin, his former chief, General Olbricht in Berlin, issued the codeword for the first stage of the troop movements that were to start the military putsch under cover of so-called 'Walküre' orders to quell civil disturbance. The conference in the Wolfschanze began at about ten minutes past one; at half-past one von Stauffenberg left and phoned the Bendlerstrasse, apparently to say that the conference had broken off early. He must also have said that he could not make the attempt on Hitler's life – if indeed it had been planned he should make it – for Olbricht countermanded the 'Walküre' orders and sent the troops back to their barracks. Von Stauffenberg meanwhile went into a special conference, presumably with Himmler, about the fifteen new divisions to be raised for the east. Himmler was certainly at the Wolfschanze that day and his handwritten notes for discussion with Hitler include the questions of the fifteen new divisions, enemy parachute attacks on Führer headquarters, Hungary and the Jews.[22]

It was not until four o'clock that Captain Klausing, waiting for von Stauffenberg with a car ready to drive away, saw him coming from the direction of the conference with Generals Fellgiebel, Army chief of communications, and Stieff, chief of Fromm's Organisation Department at the Bendlerstrasse, both strongly committed members of the conspiracy. On the way to a late midday meal with Keitel, von Stauffenberg said briefly to Klausing, 'It's come to nothing again.'[23]

There are many possible explanations for this second, or perhaps third or even fourth, abortive attempt by von Stauffenberg to plant a fused bomb near Hitler. It may be that it was primarily a test run; the 'Walküre' alert may have been to see how long it took troops from the various training schools and depots to reach the centre of Berlin, while von Stauffenberg probed the possibilities of assassination at the Wolfschanze. Olbricht visited

the units which had taken part after cancelling what he explained had been a test exercise, and told the officers they should be ready to respond to a call at short notice, 'be it for deployment in the east, be it on account of an enemy landing in the German Bight, be it to put down civil disturbance, especially in Berlin because of the presence of the many foreigners [workers]'.[24] Two days later he sent Major Oertzen, formerly on the staff of von Tresckow – who had initiated him into the conspiracy – to one of the key units, the Reserve Brigade of the Regiment Grossdeutschland at Cottbus, over sixty miles south-east of the city centre, 'to clarify the question, how long the battle group required after being alerted to civil disturbance to be in the centre of Berlin'. Oertzen also stressed the possibility of civil disturbance caused by the many foreign workers.[25]

On Sunday evening, 16 July, an inner circle of the younger conspirators gathered at von Stauffenberg's brother's house in Wannsee. Apart from the two Stauffenbergs, there were the Grafen Schwerin von Schwanenfeld, von der Schulenburg (Fritz-Dietl), and Yorck von Wartenburg, a leading spirit of von Moltke's Christian Kreisau Circle, Colonel Mertz von Quirnheim, new Chief of Staff in the General Army office at the Bendlerstrasse, Adam von Trott zu Solz from the Foreign Ministry, Colonel Georg Hansen, formerly Canaris' right hand at the Abwehr and now chief of military intelligence in Schellenberg's new regime, and Casar von Hofacker, the liaison with Paris. Von Hofacker reported again on the mood of the High Command in France; the previous day Rommel had composed an 'ultimatum' to Hitler, describing the ultimate hopelessness of the situation on the invasion front and requesting him to draw the appropriate conclusions without delay. He had handed it to von Kluge but von Kluge, not wishing to compromise himself, had not forwarded it to Führer headquarters. Von Hofacker could hardly have known this, but he could report that von Kluge remained as pessimistic as Rommel.

The discussion circled, as it must have done so many times, around the theme of negotiations to end the war. According to Hansen, von Trott asserted that the enemy would be ready to negotiate as soon as the precondition, a complete change of regime, had been met.[26] Von Trott denied this, as might be expected, under Gestapo interrogation, and insisted that it was von Stauffenberg who was convinced that the western powers would be ready to negotiate because of the rapid advance of the Russians. His own recommendation, he said, was that the Army should be in close contact with the SS so that their military–technical expertise could be complemented by 'the greater political knowledge and more elastic mentality of the SS'.[27] Under hostile questioning it is natural to say what the interrogators want to hear; the picture is further complicated by the fact that the only interrogation reports surviving are those which were sent to Bormann and were hence edited and presented to show the view of the conspiracy the SS wished to give.

The following day, 17 July, Colonel Hansen met two of the chief

liaison officers with the west, Hans-Bernd Gisevius and Dr Theodor Strünck from the Oster circle. The result of this meeting of Canaris' former officers was: 'All soundings in Switzerland have shown plainly that negotiations with England would be possible,'[28] and the Americans required a rapid termination of the war in Europe to leave them a free hand against Japan. Gisevius left this discussion and drove in Hansen's car to inform the leader of the older, original military resistance, General Beck, of the conclusions.

The same day Berthold von Stauffenberg's immediate chief in the military–political department at naval headquarters, Korvetten-Kapitän Alfred Kranzfelder, had brought von Stauffenberg news of a rumour circulating in Potsdam. A naval officer initiated into the conspiracy had attended a dinner party the previous evening given by Frau von Bredow, and had heard another officer talking openly of a forthcoming attempt on Hitler's life with a bomb at Führer headquarters. Kranzfelder came to Berlin to warn von Stauffenberg of this dangerous lack of security and at the same time to ask whether, in view of the present military situation, there was any purpose in going ahead. 'There is no longer any choice,' Stauffenberg replied. 'The Rubicon has been crossed.'[29]

In France that day Rommel started out early to tour the embattled areas of his front, encourage his men and tell selected commanders of the ultimatum he believed had been forwarded to Führer headquarters. On his way back from his last call, Sepp Dietrich at I SS-Panzerkorps headquarters, his car was spotted by three British aircraft, which dived to the attack. The driver was killed, the car crashed at speed out of control and Rommel was so severely injured that it was thought at first he would not survive. Von Kluge took over command of Army Group B in addition to his duties as Supreme Commander, West.

On the next day, 18 July, von Stauffenberg must have learned that he would be required to report at a conference in the Wolfschanze on the 20th, for he alerted Olbricht and the inner circle of officers at the Bendlerstrasse to the probability of the attempt taking place on that date. A staff officer at the General Army Office, Lieutenant-Colonel Robert Bernardis, was instructed to prepare material for his report on new divisions, and von der Schulenberg, who called in at the Bendlerstrasse at five that afternoon, was told by Mertz von Quirnheim that the attempt would probably take place on the 20th.[30] Von der Schulenberg was deputy to the Berlin police chief, Graf Helldorf, who was also in the plot, and no doubt he informed him. On the 19th von Stauffenberg received confirmation that he was required at the Wolfschanze the next day. Final preparations were put in hand, codewords agreed, and the wider circle of conspirators, military and civilian, were alerted.

At this stage it is worth speculating on how much Himmler might have known. Arthur Nebe, Chief of Criminal Police and opposition informant, told his great friend Gisevius just prior to the 15 July attempt that he was sure Himmler knew nothing of the preparations – that is according

to Gisevius' post-war account.[31] Of course, if Nebe was one of Himmler's plants inside the opposition the statement means nothing. He went on to say something rather more interesting: there had been a fundamental change in the popular attitude towards Himmler and, although still feared, he was regarded as the one man amid the confusion who had real power behind him; 'Scarcely anyone could conceive of a change in the situation without the participation of Himmler.'[32] Although similar arguments must have been voiced frequently in the conspirators' discussions, there is scarcely a trace in the Gestapo reports of interrogations of conspirators sent to Bormann; in these Himmler occurs only as a target for assassination. The single exception is the report of von Trott's recommendation that the military should avail themselves of 'the greater political knowledge and more elastic mentality of the SS'.

Nebe's remarks on the people's confusion are supported by the SD opinion reports; they reveal a total collapse in morale. Women were suffering particularly from the desperate situation and complete absence of good news; they were saying they could no longer bear to listen to the armed forces reports. People were willing to respond to Goebbels' appeals to work their utmost for 'total war', but 'only if the burdens are shared equally and the "leading circles" accept the necessary restrictions in the same measure as plain *Volksgenossen*'.[33] The evident failure of the 'Vergeltung' weapons to force the English to terms within a couple of weeks had caused a reversal of feeling; many now described the V-1s as mere propaganda weapons. The Allied air terror and deep flying attacks in broad daylight were regarded with such anxiety that 'perhaps only 60 per cent of the population has a prospect of surviving the war (comment of officers in train)'. Especially striking was an upsurge of interest in astrology, fortune telling and all manner of numerical and alphabetical methods of divining the future.[34]

Such was the deep pessimism and disillusion forming the background to the officers' plot against Hitler. If Himmler's name had not been so unsavoury that the west refused to deal with him, he would have been the natural choice to bring about a change of government – as indeed von Trott seems to have suggested. The almost total whiting out of such a solution in the Gestapo reports to Bormann speaks of the extreme sensitivity of the topic.

On the other hand Nebe's stated belief that Himmler knew nothing of the preparations is so incredible as to undermine his claims to undivided membership of the opposition. Moreover, during these July days his friend Gisevius was in constant touch with Hansen, who was not only Schellenberg's deputy, but working on the same lines as Schellenberg to establish a basis for negotiations with the west. Schellenberg was Himmler's man, and he must have been an extraordinarily poor chief of intelligence not to have known that his deputy and former members of the Abwehr associated with Canaris and Oster were working for the opposition.

Another of Himmler's RSHA chiefs with an internal intelligence service covering the Reich was Ohlendorf. He was attempting to push Himmler in the same direction as Schellenberg, flooding him with the most pessimistic public opinion reports and working in secret with leading financiers and industrialists to prepare a post-war integration of the German and western economies. Several of these industrialists were connected with the resistance, notably Karl Blessing, General Director of Continental-Öl, who was a candidate for Minister of Economics in the post-Hitler government, and Emil Hellferich, Director of Hamburg-Amerika, who was a strong candidate for the post of Minister of Finance. Both men were long-time members of Himmler's Circle of Friends and close colleagues of Keppler and Kranefuss, points which were not mentioned, of course, in the interrogation reports.

At about two o'clock each afternoon the main departmental heads of the RSHA took a working lunch with their chief, Kaltenbrunner, at Gestapo headquarters, No. 8, Prinz Albrecht Strasse. One of these, Nebe, was an avowed member of the conspiracy; two, Schellenberg and Ohlendorf, were seeking the same solution as the conspirators and controlled intelligence services which would have been plainly incompetent not to have picked up the trail of a plot that was talked of openly at Potsdam dinner tables and in Switzerland, Madrid, Stockholm and every point of liaison with the west. The fourth chief, 'Gestapo' Müller, was also in a position to know a great deal since he had infiltrated the communist underground and in early July rounded up several of the former trades unionists, socialists and communists, whom von Stauffenberg had initiated into the conspiracy, apparently at von der Schulenberg's instigation, certainly much against Goerdeler's wishes. The leading figures arrested, Adolf Reichwein and Julius Leber, knew the personalities in the conservative and military groups, for one of the chief aims of bringing them in had been to form a united civilian front from right to left. By the eve of von Stauffenberg's visit to the Wolfschanze they had been in Gestapo hands for a fortnight or more. How much Müller's interrogators had been able to extract from them can never be known; in the French resistance a man was not expected to hold out for more than twenty-four hours against Gestapo methods.

What, then, was discussed at these working lunches during the days leading up to von Stauffenberg's appointment with history? How much did each of the four chiefs know and how much did they divulge to Kaltenbrunner or directly to Himmler? Were they rivals in the deadly power game being played out over the ruins of Berlin, or were they colleagues exchanging information to save their collective skin, working on a common line from Himmler, under Kaltenbrunner's direction? Was each sitting on his own knowledge and seeking his own way out? Between them they controlled the terror state; they were also its victims, in fear of informers and the machinations of rivals. All owed their position to Himmler and knew what they could expect if caught out in double dealing. None has left a truthful record. The answer can never be known, yet in the SS empire

it is scarcely conceivable that each did not at least take out reinsurance with the Reichsführer.

Turning to France, it was, according to General Hans Speidel, the SS generals Sepp Dietrich and Paul Hausser who first came to Rommel's headquarters in early July, asking what was to be done in view of imminent catastrophe, and assuring him that they had all SS units firmly in hand – in short that the SS troops would follow Rommel's orders.[35] Sepp Dietrich made his own rules and frequently drew reprimands from Himmler for his independent action, yet it is hardly conceivable that the two most senior SS generals in the field could renege on their oath of loyalty and go over to the *Reaktion* without informing the Reichsführer of the situation. In any case, if Stroop is to be believed, and there was no reason for him to fabricate the story in his condemned cell, Himmler had an informant in the closest personal staff of von Kluge, and knew what was hatching in France – which, of course, was in line with his own aim for negotiation with the west.

So much for speculation. The best guess must surely be that Himmler was fully informed of the progress of the plot, knew that von Stauffenberg was the leading spirit in the young 'Graf's circle', knew he had been called to the Wolfschanze on 20 July – indeed he was working with him to supply reinforcements for the eastern front – and assumed that he would or might make the attempt then. The best guess about his actions, based on the methods he had employed throughout his career, was that he intended remaining on the sidelines, waiting for the work to be done for him, confident in the ability of his organisations to take control in the wake of a successful assassination of Hitler, confident at the least that he had enough cards to be able to bargain with the military to retain his internal power. The alternative would be civil war and the complete collapse of the fronts. This was, no doubt, what the British government and British intelligence hoped to stimulate; probably he or Schellenberg had discerned that too. He had risen to power by lying low in his modest and socially genial camouflage, pretending all things to all parties while secreting information, amassing dossiers, nudging events in the desired direction but keeping his options open and the confidence of both sides, until he could move in decisively one way or the other. All the indications are that he was running true to form in the July crisis of confidence within the Reich.

Stroop, who had been promoted since Warsaw to SS-Gruppenführer and Lieutenant-General of Police, was HSSPF of SS-Oberabschnitt Rhine–Westmark, taking in Lorraine and the Rhineland, where many of the depots and reserve units for Army Group B were located. His headquarters were at Wiesbaden, and there he received a call from Himmler in the night of 17/18 July after von Kluge had taken over Army Group B from the injured Rommel. Himmler instructed him not to leave Wiesbaden but to await a coded message which would assign him an important task. This came in shortly on the telex and Stroop decoded it personally. He was shocked for it concerned the activities of Rommel and von Kluge; a short time later he

received a coded dossier on their machinations by radio. Exactly what his own instructions were is not clear, but he took the precaution of moving his wife and children to a secret address, and did not sleep at his own villa.[36]

It is clear, therefore, that Himmler knew treachery was afoot; whether he knew precisely that von Stauffenberg would carry a bomb to detonate at the Führer conference on the 20th is impossible to determine. At all events he did not go to the Wolfschanze that morning, but remained at his own field headquarters some miles distant, where Kersten gave him his usual treatment. It may be significant that Dönitz was due to spend 20 and 21 July at the Wolfschanze, but put off his visit – according to the post-war recollection of his adjutant, because Mussolini was due to arrive that day, and the Duce's presence would shorten the time available for discussion with the Führer.[37] Mussolini's visit had been known for several days though. Dönitz was an ally of Himmler's, a fanatical aid and support for Hitler, and it would have been extremely useful for Himmler to have had the Navy on his side in the event of an SS confrontation with the Army. That Dönitz was tipped off is, however, more speculative even than the extent of Himmler's knowledge of von Stauffenberg's intent.

The aircraft carrying von Stauffenberg, Lieutenant von Haeften – his ADC – and a fellow conspirator, General Stieff of the Army High Command (OKH), touched down at Rastenburg airstrip some five miles from the Wolfschanze at about 10.15 on the morning of 20 July. Stieff and von Haeften drove off to the nearby OKH camp, Mauerwald, while von Stauffenberg was driven to the Wolfschanze. There he breakfasted with a number of other officers, including the adjutant to the camp Kommandant, before being called in to a small conference on reinforcements for the east, where von Haeften rejoined him. At about 11.30 all participants were called to Keitel's office and continued the discussion until about 12.30, when the Führer's *Lagebesprechung*, or situation conference, was due to begin; it had been put forward half an hour because of Mussolini's impending visit.

As they rose to go, von Stauffenberg asked Keitel's adjutant, von Freyend, if there was somewhere he could freshen up and put on a clean shirt – it was a hot and humid day. He was shown to von Freyend's own room nearby, and von Haeften went in with him to assist – in reality to help him prepare the explosive and set the time fuse, an English chemical–mechanical device.[38] It was here that the attempt went wrong. They had two packets of explosive of approximately two pounds each; both would have fitted into the leather briefcase von Stauffenberg was carrying, and it is generally agreed that if both had been used no one would have emerged alive from the *Lagebesprechung*. For some reason von Stauffenberg put only one packet in his case and set the ten-minute fuse; von Haeften retained the other, unfused.

The conference room was at the end of the so-called 'guests' barrack'; it was long and rather narrow – nearly forty feet by fifteen – with a heavy

map table down the centre supported on three solid oak transverse plinths. Due to von Stauffenberg's delay the conference had begun by the time Keitel's party entered. Hitler was at his usual place at mid-length of the table facing open windows in the long, outside wall, his back towards the blank inside partition wall; the entrance door from the internal corridor leading to the room was behind his right shoulder and immediately behind General Heusinger, who was making a report on the latest developments on the eastern front. Hitler must have turned as they entered and Keitel presented von Stauffenberg to him, then Hitler nodded to Heusinger to continue. Keitel moved across to take up his customary position on Hitler's left.

Von Stauffenberg squeezed in to the table to the right of Heusinger and his Chief of Staff, Colonel Brandt, which was as near to Hitler as he could get, bent and placed his briefcase with the fused bomb inside on the floor under the table. Straightening, he murmured an excuse about making a telephone call and left. He did not pick up his cap and belt from where he had left them outside lest he arouse the suspicion of the guard–telephonist, Wachtmeister Adam, but walked straight out of the building, thence a little distance past the communications bunker to the Adjutantur, where the chief of communications at the Wolfschanze, Colonel Sander, had his office.

The chief of Army communications, General Fellgiebel, one of the most dedicated members of the conspiracy, was with Sander, as was von Haeften. Fellgiebel went outside when von Stauffenberg appeared, and was no doubt told that the bomb had been planted. They were joined by Sander and von Haeften shortly before the bomb went off, upon which von Stauffenberg and von Haeften went to their car, waiting nearby, and told the driver to take them to Rastenburg airport. They were passed through the first guard point but by the time they reached the outer perimeter the alert had been sounded, the barrier was down, and the guard would not allow them through. Von Stauffenberg left the car, entered the guard room and phoned through to the Kommandant's office, where he found the adjutant with whom he had breakfasted earlier. He explained he had to be at the airstrip in short time to fly back to Berlin. The adjutant, not yet knowing the nature of the incident, and unable to see von Stauffenberg, capless and beltless, accepted his explanation and instructed the guard to let him through. The two officers were driven fast to the airport where their plane was waiting, and they took off for Berlin at about 1.15, some thirty-three minutes after the explosion.[39]

Von Stauffenberg naturally assumed that Hitler had been killed. However, from his position near the right-hand corner of the table, von Stauffenberg had placed the briefcase outside the solid transverse support, and this and the heavy table top itself, which Hitler was leaning over, acted as perfect blast deflectors. Those standing to the right of the support were severely, four mortally, wounded; the others, including Hitler,

suffered shock, burst eardrums, burns, but otherwise minor laceration from splinters.

One of the first to gather his wits was the Luftwaffe liaison officer, von Below. While Keitel was assisting the shocked Führer, trousers in shreds, back to his quarters, von Below went to the communications bunker to order a shutdown. He could not do this himself, only Sander could, so he had him called, then told the Lieutenant on duty to put him through to Himmler's headquarters. As the connection was made, Sander appeared, and von Below said to him, 'Attentat auf Führer – Führer lebt. Nichts darf nach aussen drangen—!'[40] ('Attempt on the Führer's life – the Führer lives. Nothing permitted to go out—!'). He was near to or holding the receiver as he said or more probably barked this, and Himmler must have heard. At all events when Sander took the telephone and asked Himmler to come at once, without telling him why, Himmler asked whether all security measures had been taken.[41]

Himmler ordered his car and escort for the drive to the Wolfschanze, then called Kaltenbrunner in Berlin and told him there had been a bomb attempt at Führer headquarters; he was to fly there immediately with a team of criminologists.

At the Wolfschanze, meanwhile, Fellgiebel, who had followed Sander to the communications bunker, thus learning that Hitler had survived, walked over towards the scene of the explosion. There he saw Hitler walking unaided. Fellgiebel's task in the conspiracy was to inform OKH and the Bendlerstrasse when the assassination had been carried out and afterwards to ensure, so far as possible, that the Wolfschanze was isolated from communication. In fact, because of the multiplicity of links and other factors, this was not feasible without preliminary measures which would have drawn the attention of the security services.[42]

Earlier, when he had seen Keitel and von Stauffenberg walking towards the Führer conference, Fellgiebel had alerted his Chief of Staff at OKH, Mauerwald, Colonel Kurt Hahn. After the explosion he had called again to tell him in code that the attempt had been made, and the communications blockade should be put in hand. Now he returned to the communications bunker, where all circuits had been broken on Sander's orders and the personnel had moved their stools back a yard from the switchboard, and told Sander to inform General Walther Thiele, the contact man at the Bendlerstrasse, that an attempt had been made on the Führer's life, but had failed. Sander was unable to reach Thiele, but left Fellgiebel's urgent message with his secretary. A little later, it appears, Fellgiebel did manage to get through to Thiele personally. He also rang Hahn at OKH to say, 'Something frightful has happened. The Führer lives' – a superbly cryptic report. When Hahn asked him what they should do, he replied, 'Block everything!' – in short carry on as planned. Soon afterwards Hahn called Thiele in the Bendlerstrasse and told him this. Thiele, therefore, had authentic news from two sources within about

twenty minutes of the explosion. It is impossible to know what he did next since everyone concerned tried to cover the tracks afterwards, but it appears that he may have left the building without saying anything to anyone. Like other conspirators later, he was faced with the awesome decision – to carry on despite the failure of the assassination and the ruthless counter-measures sure to follow, or to attempt to save his skin by distancing himself from the conspiracy. Perhaps he took himself off to consider the position, perhaps he simply lost his head. Alternatively, he may have talked to Olbricht and they both decided to wait until von Stauffenberg's return to clarify the situation.[43]

This was the second failure; it was, of course, consequent on the first. Since communications had been shut down by Sander to prevent news of the attempt leaking, and by Hahn's people to try and isolate the Wolfschanze, and since von Stauffenberg and von Haeften were out of touch in flight on their way to Berlin, there followed a dead period in the early afternoon during which the Bendlerstrasse conspirators knew nothing definite, or at least did nothing. Olbricht could not issue the 'Walküre' orders blind as he had on the 15th since if von Stauffenberg had aborted or failed he could not have explained it away as another 'exercise' within a week. In any case Fromm had not flown to the conference with von Stauffenberg as on the earlier occasion and would not have sanctioned the orders going out before it was certain that Hitler was dead.

The SS and police members of the conspiracy also knew that something had happened. After Himmler's message to Kaltenbrunner from his field headquarters, Kaltenbrunner had called the Chief of Criminal Police, Nebe, and told him to assemble a team of detectives. Nebe was, of course, in the conspiracy. His friend and conspiratorial colleague, Gisevius, was waiting at the Police Praesidium with the Berlin Police President, Graf Helldorf, another conspirator, and according to Gisevius' post-war account he (Gisevius) phoned Nebe shortly before two to ask if he knew anything. Nebe replied guardedly – since phone conversations might be tapped – that a strange thing had happened in East Prussia. Gisevius arranged to meet him at a restaurant they had used before as a rendezvous, but Nebe did not turn up; he had misunderstood and gone to another hotel.[44] Then it was time for Nebe's working lunch at Prinz Albrecht Strasse, one assumes with 'Gestapo' Müller, Schellenberg and Ohlendorf – not Kaltenbrunner, who was on his way with Nebe's detectives to the Wolfschanze. So Gisevius and Helldorf sweated it out on that hot Berlin afternoon, while the leaders of the Bendlerstrasse conspiracy, Olbricht and Hoepner, also went to lunch, and their contact man, Thiele, went no one knows where.

Quite as extraordinary and almost as unbelievable is the story from Himmler's side. He arrived at the Wolfschanze at some time before two o'clock, inspected the site and listened to the reports. No great detective work was required to find the prime suspect. Von Stauffenberg had been missed in the conference room before the explosion as Hitler had asked for information from him, and Keitel had sent someone to recall him. The

guard–telephonist, Wachtmeister Adam, believed that von Stauffenberg had done the deed since he had left the building shortly before the explosion, capless, beltless and without his briefcase; the adjutant at the Kommandantur and the guards on both inner and outer control points reported – it must be assumed – that von Stauffenberg and von Haeften had passed out within minutes of the explosion, bound for the airstrip at Rastenburg; it was confirmed from the airstrip that a plane had taken off at 1.15, bound for Berlin–Rangsdorf airport. Himmler already had his eye on Fromm and one of his generals at the Bendlerstrasse, on von Kluge and Karl von Stülpnagel in France, and on Beck, Goerdeler and the older military–conservative conspirators; he probably knew about von Stauffenberg; in any case von Stauffenberg was Fromm's Chief of Staff and was believed to be heading back to Berlin, thus presumably to the Bendlerstrasse. It is inconceivable, therefore, that Himmler did not realise that the bomb attempt was, or at the very least could be, the signal for an Army putsch as the precondition for armistice negotiations with the west. Yet he did nothing. He did not order security precautions at Prinz Albrecht Strasse or Gestapo headquarters in Paris, did not alert the Berlin–Lichterfelde depot of the Waffen-SS Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler, or the Paris SS, did not even order a watch on the Bendlerstrasse it seems. Instructions were sent to 'Gestapo' Müller at some time to have von Stauffenberg arrested when he landed at Rangsdorf, but this was a limp and ineffectual order compared to the absolute control of Berlin inward flights that could have been instituted if he and Müller had intended the action seriously. In the event von Stauffenberg was not apprehended and almost certainly landed at another airport; his driver waited vainly at Rangsdorf until late afternoon. However, the official report of Kaltenbrunner's detective team which was sent to Bormann on 26 July stated merely that von Stauffenberg had departed 'about 13.15 from airport Rastenburg to Berlin–Rangsdorf', with no further explanation.[45]

Thus the hot afternoon ticked away. In the Bendlerstrasse and the Berlin Kommandant's office in Unter den Linden, in Graf Helldorf's office in what remained of the bomb-damaged Police Praesidium, in Nebe's office, in von Stülpnagel's headquarters in Paris and von Kluge's headquarters at La Roche Guyon, and in other offices and homes the conspirators waited tensely for the anticipated call; and in parallel, among Himmler's entourage at the Wolfschanze, at Gestapo headquarters in Berlin and Paris, in Schellenberg's office and Ohlendorf's they were also waiting, while in the air Kaltenbrunner and his team headed for East Prussia and von Stauffenberg headed for Berlin. Himmler, Müller and Schellendorf were, it seems, willing to allow the conspirators the advantage of time and surprise; the conspirators lacked a leader at the centre in the Bendlerstrasse ready to take the leap. That seems to be the picture that emerges.

Yet it is striking that the announcements and instructions which the conspirators had ready and waiting to go out were not hostile to the SS

as a whole. It was 'an unscrupulous clique of Party leaders who had never seen the front line', not the SS, who were to be saddled with the odium of attempting to use the death of the Führer 'to stab the heavily engaged front in the back and grab power for their own self-interested ends',[46] and the entire Waffen-SS was to be incorporated in the Army with immediate effect. It is true that any Waffen-SS units whose obedience to the new regime appeared doubtful were to be disarmed ruthlessly, and Gestapo and SD stations and the concentration camps were to be occupied, HSSPFs and Gestapo leaders to be arrested as well as all Gauleiters and leading Party functionaries. Nevertheless it is as if the conspirators believed they could split Himmler's empire and rely on the Waffen-SS and police to assist them. There are riddles and a conflict of signs and events on this afternoon of 20 July that the most meticulous investigators have so far failed to resolve.

Ultimately everything turned on the fact that Hitler was not dead. It was not Himmler, 'Gestapo' Müller or the Leibstandarte who put down the revolt, but doubt in the minds of the conspirators. Fromm was the first leader to renege – not that he ever seems to have been fully committed. The sequence and timing of events are uncertain, but shortly before four Olbricht heard from von Haeften that he and von Stauffenberg had landed, and Hitler was undoubtedly dead. In response either to this call or to a call from OKH at about the same time, Olbricht had the pre-prepared announcements and 'Walküre' orders taken from the armoured safe and sent to the telex coding room below, and other instructions were despatched by hand. He and his Chief of Staff, Mertz von Quirnheim, went in to Fromm, told him that the attempt on Hitler's life had succeeded and that they should now issue the orders for civil disturbance. Fromm wanted confirmation of Hitler's death and since Himmler had ordered the communications blockade lifted at three o'clock Olbricht managed to have him connected with the Wolfschanze. When Fromm learned that Hitler was not seriously wounded he refused to sanction the orders. Nevertheless the action was already under way. About half an hour later von Stauffenberg arrived in the Bendlerstrasse radiating confidence and energy, insisting that Hitler could not have survived the explosion; as Fromm still refused to sanction the orders, Stauffenberg had him arrested and held under guard.

Directly it was realised at the Wolfschanze that orders for an Army take-over of power were emanating from the Bendlerstrasse, signed either by the retired Field Marshal von Witzleben claiming to have taken over executive authority, or by Fromm claiming to have been empowered by von Witzleben – although Fromm himself was under arrest – then by Hoepner, claiming to have taken over Fromm's position, Keitel began issuing countermanding orders. Thus a communications battle developed over the land lines and the air to all Army commands throughout the Reich. Von Stauffenberg fought back energetically by phone as puzzled commanders rang the Bendlerstrasse. Meanwhile the priorities in Berlin itself were not attended to. Partly because of the comparatively small

number of officers who could be initiated beforehand and the inevitable delays and confusions this now caused, partly because of the conspirators' determination not to use the gangster methods of their opponents, above all perhaps because of the doubt caused by the failure of von Stauffenberg's bomb and the fact that Hitler, the legal Commander-in-Chief, lived – or the fact that all their training had been in obedience, not revolt – whatever the causes the putschists appeared to lack conviction. The vital communications and broadcasting centres were not occupied, or if occupied were not seized by technical officers;[47] Goebbels, both Gauleiter of Berlin and Propaganda Minister – the ultimate prop of the regime – was not arrested, nor was the RSHA and Gestapo headquarters in Prinz Albrecht Strasse stormed. On the other hand Goebbels, whose role seems almost as equivocal as Himmler's, Müller's or Schellenberg's, did nothing against the putschists. To judge by results, there was a stand-off. It is true that it took over two hours for the armoured troops who were to secure the government quarter to reach the centre of Berlin, but the conspirators appear not to have attempted to seize the initiative with assault teams of the troops already near the city centre or Graf Helldorf's police, while Goebbels and Müller acted as if they had no idea anything untoward was happening.

The fact of Hitler's survival was crucial to Keitel's attempt to retain command at the Wolfschanze, yet it was not until almost quarter to six that Goebbels – apparently on Hitler's personal directive[48] – put out a brief radio announcement that there had been an attempt on the Führer's life but he had suffered only light injuries and had immediately resumed his duties, receiving Mussolini for a long discussion. This was not repeated for almost three-quarters of an hour.[49] And it was not until six or shortly after that SS-Oberführer Dr Achamer-Pifrader, accompanied by his adjutant and two plain-clothes detectives, entered the Bendlerstrasse to ask von Stauffenberg to accompany them to Gestapo headquarters for an interview with Müller. Von Stauffenberg had Pifrader and his escort arrested and placed under guard. If Himmler, Müller and Goebbels had had no inkling of the putsch plans, all this might be explained by the fog of events and natural confusion. Since Himmler and Müller at least had more than an inkling and in any case were aware by this time that treasonable orders were issuing from the Bendlerstrasse, it could only have been tacit collusion or – an even more intriguing theory – an attempt at negotiation. Already, at some time after four-thirty, Thiele – Fellgiebel's contact man at the Bendlerstrasse whose reactions and movements are so uncertain – had called up Schellenberg at the RSHA and asked him if he knew what was actually happening. It appeared to be a putsch, Schellenberg replied.[50] Perhaps Thiele was simply trying to save his skin by laying down a marker of innocence. But both this call and Pifrader's visit hint at lines of communication between the Bendlerstrasse and Schellenberg and Müller as well as Nebe and Graf Helldorf – in fact between the conspiracy and the entire Reich security and police apparatus.

What Himmler was doing all this time is not known in any detail. He escorted Hitler to the platform on the railway line that ran through the Wolfschanze at some time between two-thirty and three to meet Mussolini's train. Wolff arrived with Mussolini; as Himmler's representative in Italy, he was personally responsible for the Duce's safety. Himmler and Wolff then followed as Hitler with singed hair and right arm in a sling led his wide-eyed visitor to the conference room and showed him the bomb devastation. Afterwards they repaired to the so-called 'Tea-house' for a discussion which Mussolini wanted on Italians who had been interned as slave labourers after Italy's capitulation. Here, it must be assumed, Hitler appointed Himmler to succeed Fromm as Chief of Army Armaments and Commander of the Replacement Army. After the war Wolff said that he was one of the few present when this appointment took place, and Göring, also present, went so far as to suggest that Hitler should not stop there, but make Himmler War Minister. Wolff described Himmler saying in a small, hesitant voice, '*Mein Führer*, I can manage that as well.'[51] Wolff cannot be trusted but in the hysterical mood which Mussolini's SS interpreter described afterwards in the Tea-house, it is very likely that Göring did make such a suggestion to prove his own loyalty and ardour to settle with the reactionaries and defeatists in the Army. Himmler would no doubt have masked feelings of elation behind a modest tone. But Hitler would not have considered breaking his careful balancing system by giving the Reichsführer-SS power over the armed services as well. In Wolff's account he merely told Himmler to fly at once to Berlin and settle things at the focal point. 'You have full powers. *Zugreifen!*' ('Go to it!').

The appointment was presumably made after the first orders sent out in Fromm's name proving his guilt – unless, of course, guilt was established by association with von Stauffenberg – thus at some time after four o'clock. The first announcement came in a radio message from Keitel to the commander of Military District IV (Kassel) timed 16.15 from the Wolfschanze. This stated that Hitler was alive, that orders from von Witzleben, Fromm and Hoepner were not valid, and that Himmler was the new Commander of the Replacement Army. Himmler did not leave immediately for Berlin. It is fairly certain that he waited for Kaltenbrunner and his team of detectives, and they did not land at Rastenburg airstrip until 4.30. One anonymous witness saw Hitler giving Himmler a final exhortation on the steps of the Tea-house at about five. This was perhaps the scene Wolff described, ending with 'You have full powers. *Zugreifen!*'

'*Mein Führer*,' Himmler replied. 'You can leave it to me.'[52]

It was about this time that Dönitz, who had been summoned at the same period as Himmler, shortly after the explosion, arrived with his adjutant and joined Göring, von Ribbentrop, Keitel and Jodl for that bizarre tea party which has been described so often – each of them vying with his rivals to protest loyalty to their Führer, who sat silently, cotton wool protruding from his ears, popping coloured lozenges into his mouth

until someone mentioned the 1934 Röhm putsch, when he rose suddenly, screaming vengeance on all traitors who had dared attempt to thwart the Providence which had chosen him to lead the German people. He raged, pacing with foam flecking his lips for half an hour or so while the others sat in stunned silence and the Duce watched with bulging eyes.

Himmler and Wolff are not mentioned in the accounts of this episode. No doubt they were on their way by then. Exactly where is a mystery. According to Wolff they flew, as Hitler had directed, to Berlin. By Kersten's account Himmler returned to his field headquarters that afternoon while he was asleep after lunch. He was roused by Himmler's driver shouting 'Attempt on the Führer's life!'[53] Kersten is unlikely to have been asleep at half-past five. Perhaps Himmler returned to his headquarters after meeting Mussolini and Wolff, then drove back to the Wolfschanze, where Hitler confirmed his appointment as commander of the Replacement Army and instructed him to fly to Berlin.

Whatever time it was that Kersten was woken with the news, he went immediately to Himmler's office, entering without knocking. Himmler was standing by his desk, sorting out and destroying papers. 'The attempt was made by a colonel in the Wehrmacht,' he replied to Kersten's questioning. 'Now my hour has come. I will round up all the reactionary gang. I have already given orders for the traitor's arrest.'

Kersten asked how it was possible for the attempt to have been made without his intelligence and security services knowing anything. When Himmler did not reply, he reminded him of the report on Hitler's health some eighteen months back, and asked whether in view of that it would not have been better if Hitler had been killed.

Himmler looked up in horror mixed with anxiety. 'By preserving the Führer, Providence has given us a sign. . . . My place is now at the Führer's side. . . .' He gathered up his papers. 'I am flying immediately to Berlin.'[54]

Either, it seems, Kersten slept late after a heavy lunch, or the observer who saw Himmler taking his leave from the Tea-house was mistaken about the time, or Himmler called at the Wolfschanze briefly on the way from his field headquarters to the airport at Rastenburg. Whenever it was that he and Wolff took off for Berlin, from that point on they are lost to view until after midnight. This is scarcely surprising: Himmler was unlikely to walk openly into the centre of a conspiracy that had sent out orders for the arrest of all Party chiefs and the occupation of Gestapo and SD buildings; and his own aides who survived had no doubt good reason for keeping silent about the ambiguous nature of the SS response that day. He must have gone to earth in some communications *Zentrale* from where he could monitor and direct events. The best guess may be that he was waiting and hoping for the opposition to open talks with the west through Schellenberg's deputy, Colonel Hansen, or Dr Otto John – who had returned from Madrid on the 19th and was in the Bendlerstrasse on the 20th for the express purpose

of negotiating with his western contacts on the successful completion of the putsch – or perhaps through von Kluge, general to general, on the invasion front. Von Kluge did call off the V-1 bombardment that day as a preliminary to negotiations. On the other hand Himmler may have regarded Hitler's miraculous escape, as Kersten reported, as a sign from Providence and seen his duty as loyalty. In that case his measures thus far had been unusually inept.

Whatever his precise movements during the afternoon, he did not take off for Berlin until probably half-past five or six, at the earliest. In a speech the following week he said, '. . . I flew to Berlin in the evening of the day of the attempt on the commission of the Führer to root out the conspirators' clique in the Bendlerstrasse. . . .'[55] The turning point came while he was in the air. It occurred in the minds of the officers taking part, chiefly those not initiated into the conspiracy, starting as unease at the nature of their tasks and the provenance of the orders, turning by degrees into the certainty that it was an officers' strike against the regime. When the news spread that Hitler was alive, these men refused to carry out their orders, or actively turned against the conspirators, some because they were convinced Nazis who believed in the Führer, others from terror at the retribution that could be expected for treason.

The first decisive switch was made by the commander of the Wachtbataillon Grossdeutschland, Major Otto Remer. He had been instructed to seal off the government quarter with his units and allow no one in or out, not even generals or ministers. According to his account, he was suspicious from the start; so was his 'liaison officer to the Reich Ministry of People's Instruction and Propaganda' – a species of political commissar – Captain Dr Hans Hagen. He asked Remer to let him seek clarification from Dr Goebbels or the SD. Remer agreed, and Hagen sped away on a motorcycle to the Propaganda Ministry. No one there knew of anything untoward; Hagen insisted on seeing the Minister, and was directed to Goebbels' residence adjacent to *Gau* headquarters in Hermann Göring Strasse; there he found Goebbels equally ignorant of events. It was five minutes short of half-past five, but Goebbels expressed disbelief when told that the Wachtbataillon had orders to cordon off the government quarter. Either he was in collusion with Himmler and the RSHA and acting a part, or Himmler and Müller had deliberately kept news of the putsch from him; for, as he had stressed to Fromm earlier that year, as Gauleiter of Berlin, he was the supreme authority in the city.

Having alerted Goebbels, Hagen sped away to fetch his battalion commander, Major Remer. By Remer's account, he had established the cordon around the government quarter and was waiting in the ante-room of the Berlin military commander, General von Hase, some time after 6.30 when one of his lieutenants brought him word from Hagen that Hitler was alive, and they were dealing with a military putsch; Remer should come at once to Dr Goebbels. Remer went in to von Hase and asked permission to

see Goebbels, but von Hase, a member of the conspiracy from the beginning, refused.

After a word with some of his officers, Remer left to think things out by himself. He reached the conclusion that he should go alone to see Goebbels. Such was his account afterwards. If true this may be said to be the actual turning point of the day; he was undecided, but prepared to disobey von Hase's order. For his part von Hase was aware of Remer's doubts but was not prepared to arrest him; perhaps he felt it impracticable. The conspirators as a whole had had six clear hours since the explosion and had failed to arrest the Gauleiter of Berlin and Propaganda Minister, or prevent him using the Deutschland station to broadcast news that Hitler had survived an attempt on his life. The first bulletin had gone out, as indicated, at 5.42, shortly after Hagen's visit, the second went out about half-past six, probably just before Hagen sent word in to Remer at von Hase's Kommandantur halfway down Unter den Linden.

The dramatic switch when Remer met Goebbels, who connected him on the telephone with Hitler at the Wolfschanze, is well known. It was at about seven o'clock. According to Remer:

> The Führer told me that he was uninjured, and asked whether I recognised his voice. I said yes. The Führer told me of the base plot and said that I should place myself directly under him until the Reichsführer Himmler arrived, whom he had appointed Chief of the Home Army. I had to suppress any and every resistance by all means possible.[56]

It is evident that Hitler did not think that Himmler could have reached Berlin by this time. Flying time from East Prussia was from two to three hours depending on winds and the type of aircraft used.

Doubts resolved, Remer now acted in the most energetic way as the Führer's representative in putting down the revolt. The situation he was faced with was far from straightforward. Rumour was rife but officers from the other Army depots were still following orders from von Hase and the Bendlerstrasse. He withdrew his own units from the cordon and assembled them in Goebbels' garden where Goebbels addressed them on their historic task, then Remer told them he had been charged by Hitler himself to break the revolt ruthlessly. Leaving two companies in defence of the government complex, he ordered a third company to seal off von Hase's Kommandantur, summoned troops and tanks still at the depot, and set about convincing officers from other units that he had a commission from and acted as intelligence officer for Goebbels. All this occupied him some time, during which according to his account he was unaware that the Bendlerstrasse was the focus of mutiny. When this was reported to him he ordered a company to cordon off the block and arrest all suspects. The last instruction proved unnecessary. A group of officers within the Bendlerstrasse but not members

of the conspiracy had already taken matters into their own hands. Again it was knowledge that Hitler was alive that impelled their action, although the immediate trigger appears to have been a broadcast at nine announcing that the Führer would shortly make a broadcast and that Himmler had been appointed to command the Replacement Army. By about ten or soon after they had combined to release Fromm and, after a skirmish during which von Stauffenberg was wounded in the arm, Fromm had the principal conspirators under guard.

General Beck, virtually the founder of the military resistance and its senior figure, had come to the Bendlerstrasse that afternoon and was among those arrested. Fromm allowed him to retain his revolver to take his own life, and permitted Olbricht to write a last letter to his wife, then he announced a summary court martial in the name of the Führer, and pronounced sentence of death on 'Colonel of the General Staff Mertz [von Quirnheim], General Olbricht, the Colonel', indicating von Stauffenberg, 'whom I will not name, and Oberleutnant von Haeften.' He ordered their immediate execution.

So the revolt collapsed inwards at the centre. It had already broken down and for the same reasons in the provinces and Vienna and Prague. In France von Kluge had reneged in the same way as Fromm directly he received unequivocal evidence that Hitler was alive. And although von Stülpnagel had achieved a bloodless occupation of the Gestapo and SD headquarters in Paris and imprisoned the men in their barracks, von Kluge's refusal and the collapse in Berlin left him no option but to release them that night.

Olbricht, von Stauffenberg, Mertz and von Haeften were taken down to the courtyard of the Bendlerstrasse building and there shot by an execution squad in the headlights of parked vehicles. They paid the price for their seniors' earlier step-by-step compromise with the monster they had raised. Alternatively they died in a hopeless attempt to save Germany and her good name long after both had been lost irretrievably. They died as brave men, von Stauffenberg crying out at the last, 'Es lebe das heilige Deutschland!' ('Long live sacred Germany!').

Fromm had arranged the hasty execution to clear himself, and he immediately rang through to the Wolfschanze to report what he had done; the mood there was so hostile to him that Keitel and, after him, everyone he asked for refused to come to the telephone. Eventually it was left to Dönitz's adjutant to take the message, and when he relayed it to the assembled company there was an explosion of 'growling rage'.[57] There seems little doubt that Fromm intended the execution of the other conspirators gathered in the building, but Kaltenbrunner arrived at about this time soon after midnight with an SS detachment led by Sturmbannführer Otto Skorzeny, the commando raid expert who had accomplished the release of Mussolini. The conspirators were handcuffed in pairs and taken to the cells at Gestapo headquarters, Prinz Albrecht Strasse. No doubt Kaltenbrunner

followed them. Fromm took himself off to Goebbels' residence, where he found Himmler. According to Himmler's account in a speech to the Gauleiters on 3 August Fromm made a 'most peculiar' first impression on both Goebbels and himself. He could not help thinking that some 'uncomfortable partners, not to say witnesses, were quickly being done away with'.[58] Fromm was arrested next day – later to be executed himself.

Remer also reported to Himmler on his measures at this time, about one in the morning of the 21st at Goebbels' residence. His is the first account of Himmler's whereabouts since the anonymous witness at the Wolfschanze at about five the previous afternoon.

The officers' uprising had been wrecked by ineptitude and half-heartedness and turncoats like Fromm and von Kluge, and it had been put down in Berlin by Goebbels and Remer without the assistance of the SS or, it seems, any direction from Himmler or Kaltenbrunner. It may be that Himmler had not intervened because he wanted to avoid increasing friction between Army and SS or even provoking a civil war. This was the impression he sought to convey in his subsequent speeches:

> it was my intention . . . that no one apart from the Army and the companions of the Army should clear out the nest. No hand should be lifted against the Army by another arm of the Wehrmacht. . . . An institution can only be saved for the future after such an inner breakdown and frightful deed, if the organisation itself removes the unworthy members, discharges and stands them against the wall.[59]

This sounds like a convenient justification for his inaction. Had Hitler been killed things would have turned out differently.

In the event Himmler was undoubtedly the chief beneficiary of the failed putsch. In addition to his manifold powers and incursions into every area of economic life, he was now Chief of Army Armaments and Commander of the Replacement Army.

By extraordinary coincidence on the same day, 20 July, Häschen Potthast bore a second child for him at Professor Gebhardt's clinic at Hohenlychen, some ninety miles north-west of Berlin – a girl who was named Nanette Dorothea.[60] That he was at his field headquarters that morning and not by her side is hardly surprising considering the critical situation.

It was not only Himmler who gained by the failed attempt. Hitler's position was strengthened enormously. For the paladins at the Wolfschanze, for Keitel and Jodl and the other military men who could count themselves fortunate at escaping mutilation or death at the hands of a brother officer, for ordinary Germans oppressed, in the words of the SD public opinion report, by 'a kind of creeping panic'[61] at the steadily worsening news from every quarter, the explosion in the conference room acted like a

cathartic, releasing pent-up desperation.[62] 'Holy wrath and boundless fury fill us at the criminal attempt on the life of our beloved Führer . . .',[63] Dönitz proclaimed the same night. Jodl told his staff, 'sympathy [with the conspirators] won't do, and the time for lenience is past. Merciless hate to all who oppose!'[64] Others expressed their feelings in maledictions: Bormann proclaimed the plotters a 'reactionary criminal riff-raff . . . with the stature of miniature pipsqueaks [*Miniatur-Würstchen*]'.[65] Von Ribbentrop informed his diplomats of the 'traitorous and criminal generals' who had 'spread their cowardly and defeatist view to contaminate weak characters and draw them into their intrigue . . .'.[66]

Hitler clutched at his escape as a sign. He made the same point to the German people that night over the air as he had to Mussolini while viewing the wreckage: his escape was confirmation from Providence that he should continue precisely as before on his path to his 'life's goal'. To a man, his followers clutched at the same straw. Dönitz, characterising the conspirators as 'an insane generals' clique . . . the tools of our enemies, serving them in characterless, cowardly and false cunning', told the Navy that 'Providence . . . has sheltered and protected the Führer and thereby not abandoned our German Fatherland in its battle of destiny.'[67] Göring, using much the same epithets, proclaimed, 'The Führer was saved by almighty Providence as if by a miracle . . .', and ended with a slightly different formula for believers, 'Long live our Führer, who was so visibly blessed today by almighty God.'[68] Bormann wired the Party leaders, 'The fortunate deliverance of the Führer signifies at the same time the deliverance of the German *Volk*,'[69] and von Ribbentrop described the *Volk* as seeing 'the miraculous deliverance of the Führer from the most extreme danger as a sign from Providence, which desires the Führer to carry through his work . . . victoriously to the end'.[70] Goebbels used the same theme in his propaganda campaign.

While all appear to have been slavishly following Hitler's line, there is every psychological reason to believe that it was a spontaneous group reaction, the more extreme since they dared not admit even to themselves – least of all to themselves – that the conspirators who had threatened their position had been expressing the doubts they themselves held and the anxieties of the German people as a whole. And no doubt because their rage was directed as much at the traitor each perceived within himself, it was accompanied by lust for revenge. Dönitz commanded his men to 'destroy ruthlessly anyone who reveals himself as a traitor!' Jodl demanded of his officers and officials 'merciless hate!' Göring instructed the Luftwaffe to take drastic action in 'rooting out these traitors', who were 'to be arrested and shot. . . . Officers who took part in this crime place themselves outside their *Volk*, outside the Wehrmacht, outside every concept of soldierly honour, outside oath and loyalty. Their extermination will give us new strength.'[71] Jodl expressed a higher aspiration in his homily to his staff – it came straight from the Prussian military code: he was sure

they would hold out but 'if fortune should be against us then we must determine at the end to take arms and rally round the Führer, thereby justifying ourselves before posterity. . . . we have to stand before history and before eternity.'[72]

Thus 20 July marked not only the disastrous end of the opposition schemes but the consummation of the Nazi revolution. The officer corps of the Army, the pillar of the counter-revolution, was broken, its honour fatally compromised by a treason, which was compared to the 'stab in the back' of 1918. Four days afterwards Keitel joined Göring and Dönitz in offering Hitler the adoption of the Nazi salute in all arms of the services 'as a sign of the unbroken loyalty to the Führer and the close union between Wehrmacht and Party'. At the same time the inner circle at Hitler's court had become more closely bound to him, less inclined to tolerate their own or others' treasonable thoughts about possible ways out. They had to believe in him; without him their own power dissolved; they were bound to him. They had also come to realise he was their talisman, for Goebbels had anchored his image firmly in the hearts of the *Volk*. The SD public opinion report after the event described the people heaving a collective shudder of relief that the Führer had survived the attempt. 'Almost without exception the bonds to the Führer and faith in the leadership have deepened and strengthened. . . .' It was further reported that Himmler's appointment as commander of the Replacement Army had raised the people's expectation of a 'fundamental cleansing'[73] in all positions into which reactionary elements had insinuated themselves. How much this was a genuine response, how much Ohlendorf's insertion to propitiate his chief is difficult to know. What does seem certain is that it was not simply Gestapo terror that ruled out a further concerted attempt to seize power – although terror was a powerful factor – but a general closing of the ranks against the enemy within. The allies were committed to Germany's 'unconditional surrender'; Germany was now committed to rally round the Führer. Whether there had ever been any realistic way out is doubtful, but after 20 July it is certain there was none.

Himmler's remarks to Kersten on the afternoon of the attempt suggest that he realised this immediately. What were the papers he was destroying? Symbolically they may stand for his bridges. But once again in crisis he kept a cool head. While Hitler, Bormann and the Wehrmacht chiefs were crying vengeance and instructing their people to root out and liquidate any conspirators they could find, Himmler, directly he saw that the putsch had collapsed, sought to conciliate, calm and avoid factions. This is indicated plainly by a telegram marked 'Immediate!' ('Eilt Sehr! Sofort auf den Tisch!') which Bormann addressed to all Gauleiters at 11.35 on the morning of 21 July:

> The commander of the Replacement Army, Reichsminister H. Himmler, urgently requests you to halt all further independent proceedings against officers

who showed an uncertain attitude or even those who have to be regarded as open enemies.

The commander of the Replacement Army requests you to send him your records in all cases which in your opinion need to be cleared up. Heil Hitler! M. Bormann.[74]

It was a necessary precaution, as indicated by countless acts of personal vengeance and vendetta which ensued over the following weeks despite this instruction.[75]

Himmler also appears to have talked Hitler out of a desire for great show trials receiving maximum publicity on film and radio, and to have persuaded him instead to have the conspirators handed over to the Volksgerichtshof, or People's Court, for similarly managed sentencing processes but before small audiences selected strictly for political reliability.[76] Since the military could be tried only by their own kind, this involved a prior Court of Honour to expel the conspirators from the service. It is an indication of the depths to which the morale and indeed the honour of the officer corps had sunk that there was no difficulty in assembling a bench of generals under the chairmanship of Field Marshal von Rundstedt – so lately sacked for his own defeatism as Supreme Commander in France – which was willing to expel the required officers solely on Gestapo evidence without hearing their defence.

The same day, 21 July, that Himmler sent his urgent request to Bormann to prevent the Party taking out its feelings on the reactionary elements it loathed, he gave an emollient address to the officers of his new command in the Bendlerstrasse.[77] During the course of it he set out his ideas on a theme he was to develop in subsequent speeches that summer and autumn: what was the sense or purpose of the war? It was obviously something he had to tackle if he was to restore morale and combat the defeatism which he knew from the SD reports was rife throughout the nation, and was likely to be pronounced here in the headquarters of the conspiracy.

It was, he explained, first, to validate Germany as a world power, as the Seven Years War had validated Prussia as a European power; second, to widen and consolidate a Germanic empire from 90 to 120 million people; third, to reorganise this greater Germanic Reich in respect of defence, economics and population – by which, of course, he meant race.

We must be clear about it, this invasion from Asia, such as has occurred this time, will recur continually in 50, in 100, in 200 years. Only we shall not have an Adolf Hitler each time. We must create the preconditions for our *Volk* to enable it to withstand these assaults.

Another necessity of our struggle is the expansion of our settlement space. In the course of the next few years we will at least recover what we have lost in Russia. Defensive borders will be created, the east will be a troop-training area where every division will be able to engage in keen exercises against [partisan] bands at least once a year, or at least twice yearly.

The problem of army maneuvers and war games without real bullets will be solved.

Given the knowledge he had as overall chief of intelligence and chief of the Waffen-SS, given the sober reflections that had led him to seek an accommodation with the west, and the shrunken borders of the Reich Schellenberg had persuaded him to accept for the purpose, such ideas seem fantasy or fiction designed to put heart into his audience. They were the aims he had always advanced, unchanged from the days when Germany had been the hammer; now she was the anvil. The situation deteriorated by the week, but he continued to talk of expanding the borders, and with increasing eloquence pictured the great future of the Germanic Reich. Had he lost himself in fantasy because it was too painful to contemplate the *cul de sac* into which Germany had been led, or because he had no alternative now but to put all his faith in the Führer? Was it a collective fantasy which they all, Bormann, Goebbels, von Ribbentrop, Dönitz, Speer, shared with Hitler and talked up among themselves? Or was he deliberately misleading his audiences?

There is a file note of his conversation at dinner on 17 November 1938, which records him saying to his guests, 'One may never lie, never be inwardly untrue, not in politics, nor in daily life.'[78] There is also Professor Gebhardt's testimony that Himmler always believed what he was saying at the time he was saying it.

Nevertheless, there are signs of deliberate deception at this time: on 26 July, for instance, when speaking to the officers of one of the new divisions raised to plug the holes in the eastern front, he told them that reports suggested the first four weeks of V-1 rocket fire had caused 120,000 deaths in London – a figure, he went on, which absolutely agreed with the number of rockets he knew had been fired.[79] It was a fantastic number. Churchill had reported to the House of Commons under 3000 deaths from V-1s in this period. Lies had always been an integral part of Nazi propaganda. Whether he was convinced that lies were justified by the greater ends they served or whether he had become incapable through his years of power and his closeness to Hitler of separating wish from sober calculation, falsehood is surely indivisible. No doubt all his statements were and had always been compounds of personal fantasy and propaganda fiction blending indistinguishably into each other. Now that reality had diverged so far from Nazi fantasy, it had merely become more obvious.

He had an absolute belief in victory, he told all his audiences, and protested that he had never doubted final victory even for a second – an even more certain proof that he lied knowingly. The grounds for his belief remained as they had been since the Reich was forced on the defensive, the sudden and unexpected turn in the Seven Years War which had allowed Frederick the Great to emerge victorious from a seemingly hopeless situation, the historical truism that coalitions seldom endured throughout the course of great wars, and, most convincing, the divergences in outlook and interest between the Russians and the western powers.

'It is a race now whether the Bolsheviks double-cross the Americans, or the Americans the English – because they are certainly not very united – or whether the English double-cross both the others . . .', he told the officers of the new Infantry Division 545, termed Volksgrenadiers, on 26 July.[80]

> There are hundreds of points of friction. Sooner or later, if we have the nerve – and we have it – one of them will break out of the coalition because the war is senseless for them, above all because they can no longer sustain it inwardly. They can no longer hold their people to it. And when the coalition has come apart, then the war is over, then is our victory. The war is precisely as surely to be won as the world war was in November 1918, January 1919, if only we had had a firm leadership then, a loyalty pervading the whole *Volk* up to the top, and good nerves.

Thus the legend of the 'stab in the back' and the undefeated German Army had become historical truth to be hung like an albatross around the neck of those unborn then.

This time, he went on, they had all the preconditions lacking in 1918. The *Volk* was of unprecedented decency. This noun, *Anständigkeit*, or in adjectival form, *anständig*, occurred repeatedly as a leitmotif throughout his speeches, as it did throughout the protestations of so many who survived the war. In this case he had already told his audience what this 'decency' or 'propriety', 'fairness', 'respectability' of the *Volk* signified: the *Volk* in the homeland differed from its counterpart in 1918 as it had been cleansed of Jews and all criminal riff-raff.

> From this element not the least danger threatens Germany. Because you know indeed – I speak here in this circle to you, my officers entrusted to me by the Führer, completely openly – you know indeed that for ten years, as a precaution, I have locked up what was the scum of Germany, the professional criminals, the asocials, and these are today the most industrious armaments workers on a scale that you as individuals cannot conceive. Of many important weapons and apparatus needed by the Wehrmacht, a third is manufactured in these camps. We are in the fortunate position that we have no more Jews within, so the scum of all revolts has been eradicated in the mass of the people.

The other chief difference from 1918 was, of course, that they had as only once in a thousand years the leader sent by fate, Adolf Hitler.

> I come to something which has indeed echoed through my whole talk. That which I desire from you is that which I carry in myself; a belief shaken by nothing, the belief in the Führer, the belief in the future of this greater German – no, this greater Germanic Reich the belief in our own worth, in ourselves. That is something which I must desire, that without any phrase-making I should like to arouse in you as a sacred flame. It is your most important task, my commanders, that you yourselves at no second and in no hour – however desperate it may appear – lose the belief in final victory, the

> belief in our Germanic mission, that you never give expression to inner illusory and deceptive calculations and judgement.

This was surely a revealing sentence.

It is noticeable that with Himmler's increased powers and his new task of raising Volksgrenadier divisions to reinforce the east, he became the subject of heightened propaganda – much of it by SS organs – and the front-line service he had hinted at in his own earlier speeches became established fact. Thus an item broadcast on 24 July had him entering the 11th Bavarian Regiment in 1917 as a cadet 'and in 1918 he came to the front.'[81] The following month the 'Voice of the SS' broadcast, 'In 1917–18 he fought in the German Army, which had to lay down its arms, unbeaten. . . .'[82]

He gave the same impression in his speeches. He stood before them 'as a soldier among soldiers'. He appealed to his new Bendlerstrasse and Volksgrenadier officers as their commander, friend and comrade just as he was, he said, for his own men. 'I know no difference here and I bring my full confidence to this German officer corps, and I know that decency and chivalry are as ever best joined in Germanic peoples. And I should like to give you, the officer corps, a watchword which is an ancient German one. In the middle ages it stood over the offices of the merchant houses, if I translate it into high German: "Honour is compulsion enough!" In that sense we all want to act. . . .'

He was frank about life expectancy on the eastern front. For a company commander it was not more than three months, for a battalion commander at the most four months before he was killed or wounded. To lament this was as foolish as it was unmanly. 'That is war . . .', and he went on to describe how Frederick the Great in the Seven Years War had become so short of men that he had opened the jails, reinforced his battalions with criminals and sent fifteen-year-olds to lead them and the last sons of the nobility – normally reserved so that they might continue their line. 'And [he] held out and won the war in 1763.'

Himmler also appealed to sentiment. He enjoined the officers to inspire their men with 'the sacred fire of real German soldiers' traditional honour' and belief in their Führer and to explain to them what it was they were fighting for. 'Tell him each day to think of his child and his little sister or his parents, his wife – that he protects them, that he protects the purity of our blood and the loveliness of our land, our homeland. . . .'

His final appeal was to philosophy and the ties of race:

> so long as the Aryan lives, so long as our blood, Nordic–Germanic blood, lives, so long there will be order on this globe of the Lord God.
>
> And this task, from eternity out into the eternity of our *Volk*, is placed in the hands of each generation, especially ours. And when you see these periods of time, timeless, then I believe that each of you in the hour of difficulty and

> danger will realise what a short second that is in the life of the earth, in the life of our *Volk*. And during this short second the only thing that matters is that he who lives precisely there [at that time] now does his duty. . . .

And he returned to a favourite theme which he expressed often at this period: 'some time we will come to the end of our existence, hence we want to do everything today so that we are able to say at the end, and our children and grandchildren can say of us: "They were worthy, our fathers, our ancestors, to have been officers of Adolf Hitler, the Führer sent by the Lord God, in the most difficult time for the Germanic *Volk*."'

So he sent his new young Volksgrenadier officers into the savage fighting on the eastern front. There is no reason to doubt the effectiveness of his words; there are ample testimonies to the impression they made on SS and Party listeners committed to the ideology,[83] and these young men had been steeped in it throughout their time at school. Probably he believed in the sentiments as he uttered them. Viewed objectively and with hindsight it is plain that he was sending youth to slaughter for a hopeless cause simply to retain power, and that in the period that he continued to do so between July 1944 and the end of the war the following spring more German cities were reduced to hollow shells of rubble and more of the kith and kin they were ostensibly protecting were killed in the air terror than in the whole war to that date. At the time, however, the only alternative was unconditional surrender, the end of the Nazi Party, the division and occupation of Germany by the enemy powers and the trial of 'war criminals', among whom his own name was second only to Hitler's.

All the historic forces which had impelled Germany to this point, its necessary warrior past and all the philosophers and romantics who had forged from it the Aryan myth, the race-hygiene scientists, the *Herr Professoren* who had interpreted history in terms of Germany's all-conquering mission and *Kultur*, the soldiers and statesmen who had drunk from the Prussian legend and created the myth of the 'stab in the back' and the 'unbeaten German Army' of the First World War – all the forces which had created Himmler's world impelled him on, and without them he was literally nothing. At the same time all the historic forces which that mission had called into being against Germany, and the loathing, and the determination that she should be so dismembered that she could never rise again from a second Versailles to plunge Europe into a Third World War dictated that there could be no softening of the allies' demand for unconditional surrender and the absolute destruction of all that German militarism and Nazism stood for. This was the legacy of history, and the resolution of these opposing forces could only come through further fighting, slaughter, suffering, hate and unbridled destruction.

In this sense Himmler's words were the authentic voice of German destiny, beside which the hopes of the conspirators had been, as he described them, pathetic dreams. Yet they were, of course, also his own

dream. He could or would not understand the horror his name evoked, and he continued to seek western contacts where the conspirators had left them. He even convinced himself that the worse things became for Germany, the more the borders were forced in towards the centre, the more coercive power this rump between the advancing armies would acquire: 'A peculiar fact! Each week that passes heightens our political value and increases our [political] force. I might say as an explosive wedge or as explosive to blow the enemy coalition right apart. The coalition of our enemies, England, America, Russia, is and was from the first an unnatural one. . . .'[84]

Consequently it is possible, even probable that when he spoke of pushing out the eastern borders to the Urals, and of the great German future which he saw beyond the hard present, he believed it. Equally, much of the time, and in the small hours of the night, he must have known it was all a chimera. In early September, as the Red Army occupied the Rumanian oil fields and invaded Bulgaria, and Finland dropped out of the war against Russia, he took to his bed with stomach cramps, that sure indicator of his psychic health. Kersten found him in agony with the Koran lying by his bedside. 'I can't bear this pain any longer,' Himmler told him.[85]

15

Most Powerful Man in the Reich

The dissonance between Himmler's phrases on decency and the inferno they cloaked grew if possible more marked during the death agonies of the Reich after 20 July. The city of Warsaw became a gruesome example. The sight of beaten and demoralised German troops retiring from the remnants of Army Group Centre earlier that summer had heartened the Polish underground, or Home Army, and convinced the commander, General Tadeusz Bor-Komorowski, that the Germans would be unable to prevent the rapid advance of the Red Army across the Vistula to take Warsaw. As Soviet tanks approached the eastern suburbs on 29 July Bor took the decision to stage an armed uprising within the city on the afternoon of 1 August.

It was in many respects a political decision. Stalin had encouraged and supported a rival – virtually enemy – Polish underground, People's Army, and had set up a communist-led Polish Committee for National Liberation as his agency to bring the country into the Soviet orbit after liberation. The Home Army, however, was the fighting arm of the Polish émigré government in London, and their aim in rising against the German occupiers was not simply to help the Red Army liberate the capital, but to be in possession as a conservative–nationalist Polish force opposing the Committee for Liberation and Stalin's plans for a communist take-over when the Soviets entered. Since the Home Army was the largest and most powerful partisan organisation in Europe it represented a serious obstacle to Stalin's plans.[1]

In the event Stalin was aided by Hitler's determination to hold Warsaw, both as communications centre and as bastion of the right flank of the German forces. Reinforcements were moved in from the Baltic and France, including a 'fire brigade' SS-Panzerkorps formed from the elite Wiking and Totenkopf divisions reinforced by the Army's 19th Panzerdivision. The Home Army uprising coincided with the Panzerkorps counter-attacking the Russian forces outside Warsaw, threatening their extended lines of communication and forcing them into a defensive posture. Bor and his approximately 40,000-man underground army were thus left on their own as they attacked German patrols and strongpoints in the city.

It is another indication of Hitler's faith in Himmler that he commissioned him rather than the newly appointed Supreme Commander, East, General Heinz Guderian, to extinguish the uprising. Of course

Himmler was responsible for anti-partisan actions behind the front, yet the proximity of the Red Army and the fact that Wehrmacht units were in the city to defend it meant that it was in the area of Army operations. Here is Himmler's account to Army officers of the circumstances in which Hitler charged him with the task:[2]

> When I heard the news of the rising in Warsaw I went immediately to the Führer. I should like to tell you this as an example of how one should take news of this kind quite calmly. I said, '*Mein Führer*, the time is disagreeable. Seen historically [however] it is a blessing that the Poles are doing it. After five, six weeks we shall leave. But by then Warsaw, the capital, the head, the intelligence of this former 16–17 million Polish people will be extinguished, this *Volk* that has blocked us in the east for 700 years and has stood in our way ever since the first battle of Tannenberg. Then the Polish problem will no longer be a large problem historically for our children who come after us, nor indeed for us.'

Himmler's appointment was ideological–political; even at this late hour, he was to resume the programme begun in 1939 to decapitate the Polish people, leaving the remnants for service as an itinerant labour force for the Reich. This probably explains why talks some months previously between representatives of the Home Army and Himmler's security chief in Warsaw, Dr Ludwig Hahn, to probe the possibilities of a Home Army alliance with Germany against the communists were stopped by Hitler.[3]

Now, as Himmler told the Army officers in his address, he ordered Warsaw razed to the ground. 'You may think I am a frightful barbarian. I am, I may say, if I have no other choice.'

He appointed his veteran anti-partisan commander, SS-Gruppenführer Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski, to head the operation, providing him with the notorious Dirlewanger Brigade of poachers, criminals, de-graded officers, court-martialled servicemen, SS men on punishment and foreigners on probation for the Waffen-SS; the equally savage anti-partisan Kaminsky Brigade, recruited chiefly from Ukrainian prisoners of war whose hatred for Poles equalled their hatred for the Soviets; regular police units from Posen under the command of the SSPF (SS and Polizei Führer) there, SS-Gruppenführer Heinz Reinefarth; and part of the 22nd SS-Cavalry Brigade Maria Theresia, recruited from ethnic Germans in Hungary. The largest single formation was Kaminsky's, incorporated officially into the Waffen-SS at this time as the 29th Waffen Grenadier Division Rona (Russian); Kaminsky himself was appointed SS-Oberführer.

Von dem Bach was provided with artillery, including the heaviest field service weapon used in the war, the 60 cm (23.6 inch) bore Karl mortar – which fired a 4850 lb shell capable of penetrating eight feet of concrete – flame-throwers, gas machines for the sewers, MG 42 machine guns and the latest 'miracle weapons', remote control miniature tanks called Goliaths.

These tanks were some four and a half feet long, ran on caterpillar tracks and packed 200 lb of high explosive; guided to their target by wire or radio and then detonated, they were ideal for punching holes in street barricades without loss of life from sniper fire. Von dem Bach also disposed of actual tanks equipped with mortars, and could call on the Luftwaffe for Stuka dive-bombers.

Given this formidable arsenal, two pathological commanders, Kaminsky and Dirlewanger, for the largest formations, themselves composed of a lethal ethnic and criminal mix, an SS-Führer, Reinfarth, racially as indoctrinated and ruthless as Jürgen Stroop, and Himmler's orders on behalf of the Führer to level the city – to which he added an authorisation to kill all Poles out of hand[4] – the results were hideously predictable.

Blocks of houses were burned methodically; the civilian occupants were herded into public places, squares, parks, cemeteries, where they were mown down with machine-gun fire, ripped with blast and fragments of lobbed grenades and afterwards burned on mass pyres. Some were ordered to tear planks from fences and hold them against their bodies as they were shot in order to assist the subsequent conflagration. Neither age nor sex was regarded; in that respect the earlier stages of the action resembled the *wild* stage of the mass slaughter of Jews. The testimony of witnesses and survivors is similar. Janini Rozinska, for example, described being hurried along with her two children to a tram depot in Mlynarska Street; there she found herself with some 200 or so Poles corralled by SS and others without SS insignia. A machine gun had been set up and opened fire: 'After the first salvo, wounded began to be visible in the crowd. The Germans then threw hand grenades. . . . My little son was seriously wounded in the back of the head. A grenade had wounded my daughter in the legs, belly and chest. When everybody in the group had fallen, the Germans began shooting at any wounded who raised themselves or moved. . . .'[5]

One who survived a larger mass shooting by falling at the first salvo and pretending death, Waclawa Szlacheta, described a soldier afterwards walking up to a perambulator holding the seven-month-old twins of her neighbour, Jabuczyk, and shooting them both. She was unable, she testified, to state the exact time a German finished off her own daughter, Alina.[6]

Other units meanwhile were storming hospitals, indulging orgies of killing, looting and rape among patients, nurses and nuns alike. Many of the men were drunk. The war diary of the German Ninth Army HQ in the city recorded Kaminsky's Brigade as having 'boozed its way' in from the southern suburbs.

Such methods were militarily indefensible and counter-productive so far as the suppression of the Home Army uprising was concerned. They can only be explained by the savage spirit of racial vengeance and violence spawned in the Freikorps by the humiliation of defeat in the first war, handed down and heightened now by the prospect of defeat in the second. The spirit radiated from Führer headquarters. Again Himmler was carrying

out superior orders, again he was passing them down in the most extreme form to men he had handpicked for lack of scruple. Warsaw was again an epitome of the system and his place within it.

The Home Army units were short of arms and soon short of ammunition and food; their lack of artillery and what appears a cavalier approach to tactics meant that they failed to breach the strongest citadels of German command in the city or gain the Vistula bridges that would have opened the way towards the Red Army in the eastern suburbs. Like the Jews before them, their principal tactic was to allow German and 'Ukrainian' units to close before opening sniper fire aimed especially at officers and hurling home-made Molotov cocktails. They sortied and escaped by means of the sewer system. If there was no escape they fought to the last man and woman, knowing in any case that their enemy gave no quarter: prisoners were shot immediately or sent before advancing tanks as human barricades; wounded were shot or sprayed with petrol and burned where they lay like the civilian victims of the executions. For their part, the Polish units gave no quarter either.

For a long time the Home Army received no help from the great powers. Stalin pretended to dismiss their stand as 'reckless adventurism' and refused to drop supplies, send fighters against the German dive-bombers, or even permit British or American aircraft to use Soviet airstrips on supply missions. The US Ambassador in Moscow was told that even damaged aircraft would be refused permission to land. The Royal Air Force managed sporadic drops from mid-August with aircraft based on Brindisi, Italy, but by this time von dem Bach had driven a wedge of destruction right through the city to the Vistula, dividing the Polish-held areas from one another. Only help from the Russian forces in the eastern suburbs could have offset the weight of von dem Bach's technological advantage; this did not come. In his study of the Russian campaign John Erickson concludes that it was not simply Stalin's political motives, but the strategic balance of the Russian armies at the end of a 300-mile supply line and under attack from German armour south of Warsaw that dictated their halt on the other side of the Vistula, and 'it was not simply a matter of being checked before Praga [east-bank Warsaw], but of preparation for a bigger battle that barred the way to Warsaw.'[7]

Meanwhile the Poles, pressed into ever smaller enclaves, clung on with fierce courage. At the end of the month Bor reported to London that the capital had become 'a city of ruins' in which 'the dead are buried inside the ruins or alongside them.'[8] Stalin's inaction and attempts to prevent the western allies helping the Home Army now threatened a major scandal in the west. It was no doubt Himmler's knowledge of the dangerous rift opening out that encouraged him in September to liken Germany's position to an 'explosive wedge' which would 'blow the enemy coalition right apart'.

During the second week in September, Stalin began mending his bridges with the west; he agreed to Anglo-American use of Russian airstrips to supply Warsaw, authorised the Red Army command to

send up fighters against the Stukas, to bombard the German positions in Warsaw with artillery and send the 1st (Soviet) Polish Infantry Division – formed from previous Polish prisoners of war – into the eastern suburb of Praga to fight its way to the Vistula. He must have known it was too late. The Soviet Poles succeeded in reaching the river, but the Germans held the western (Warsaw) bank, and blew all bridges across. The commander of the Polish division, General Zygmunt Berling, exceeded his orders by launching improvised amphibious crossings in the nights of 16 and 17 September, establishing minor bridgeheads on the western bank, and linking up with units of the Home Army, but he was not supported by the Russians and was soon ordered to withdraw back across the river.

By this time towards the end of September there was nothing left for Bor but surrender. He was able to consider this because Hitler had been persuaded to grant combatant status to the Home Army; the survivors emerged from the ruins with their weapons and red and white armbands, their wounds and their pride and marched between curious and respectful German soldiers lining the street. They left some 15,000 of their comrades dead beneath the still smouldering debris, together with perhaps 200,000 civilians.[9]

The action cost the German anti-partisan and regular forces 10,000 dead, 9000 wounded, 7000 missing – high losses due in part to the debauched behaviour of Kaminsky's men and the excess *Draufgängertum* enforced in Dirlewanger's Brigade. The rewards bestowed on these two commanders at Himmler's instigation, or at least with his sanction, were for some reason very different. Kaminsky was removed and quietly executed and the results of a mock partisan ambush staged for the benefit of his followers; Dirlewanger received the Knight's Cross. Both von dem Bach and Reinefarth were promoted to the command of Army corps in the final battles in defence of the east.

Meanwhile all remaining civilians were evacuated from Warsaw, the able-bodied to forced labour for the Reich, the infirm to special camps or the gas chambers; some 1000 Jews who had survived Stroop's action or escaped from labour gangs had fought with the Poles and approximately half of them had been killed.[10] *Räumungs* or 'Clearance' Kommandos went into what remained of Warsaw to take out anything of value and they were followed by special teams equipped with flame-throwers and explosive to complete Hitler's order to erase the city. They did not demolish all the walls, but Poles returning after 'liberation' by the Red Army found only tall chimney stacks and rubble behind the blackened and empty façades.

In Berlin during the agony of Warsaw the chief surviving conspirators of 20 July endured personal agony at the hands of Gestapo and Criminal Police officials, and subsequent trial and execution. The lust for vengeance

surrounded Hitler; yet again Himmler, as chief executive, contrived to interpret the mood in the most extreme form. On 3 August, before von Rundstedt's Court of Honour had passed its first act of expulsion from the Wehrmacht on twenty-two of the most obviously culpable officers, Himmler had told a gathering of Gauleiters of his intentions towards the leaders of the revolt. Already, he said, he had had the bodies of von Stauffenberg, Olbricht, Mertz and von Haeften disinterred from the spot where they had been buried hurriedly on the night of the execution. 'I then gave the order to have the corpses burned and the ashes scattered in the fields. We do not want the least remembrance of these people – or those who will presently be executed – in any grave or other spots.'[11]

The next step, he went on, was to establish 'an absolute *Sippenhaftung*', by which he meant the arrest of all relations of these men. He had broached the subject of *Sippenhaft* the previous week in his address to the officer corps of the new Volksgrenadier Division.[12] It was an old German custom, he had told them, that the family or clan answered for each member. It was nothing unreasonable. Just as the family of a soldier honoured and endowed by the state benefited, so the family of one who was disloyal had to be drawn to account if they were not able to prove that they had expelled him or her – for it might be the soldier's wife or relatives who were guilty. For all the homely phraseology, it had been a plain warning. With the Gauleiters it was different; he wanted their approval, and he wanted to explain how they should answer fainthearts. For already, he told them, his people had begun arresting the families concerned.

> No one should come to us and say: 'What you are doing is Bolshevistic.' No, do not be touchy. It certainly is not Bolshevistic, but very ancient and was in common use with our ancestors. You only need to look up the Germanic Sagas. If they proscribed a family and outlawed them, or if there was a blood feud in the family, then they were drastically thorough. If the family were outlawed and proscribed, they said, 'This man is a traitor, the blood is bad, there is bad blood in them, that will be eradicated.' And in the case of a blood feud it was eradicated down to the last member of the whole *Sippe* [clan]. The family of Graf Stauffenberg will be extinguished to the last member—

The Gauleiters applauded. 'For it must be a uniquely cautionary example,' he went on, evidently encouraged by the reaction.

> Moreover it will be left to the discretion of everyone in Germany named Stauffenberg – generally speaking *all* who bear the unfortunate names which are mixed up in this treason trial – to propose to change their name, since one cannot expect them to continue bearing the name of a scoundrel and traitor.
>
> We shall, however – and this is very important – seize the belongings, the properties of all the families in which a member took a leading part in this conspiracy, and in this disloyalty and sedition.

These threats were fulfilled, not so much systematically except perhaps in the case of von Stauffenberg, but arbitrarily since Himmler refused to set ground rules which might inhibit personal discretion.[13] The Stauffenberg clan was pursued with the utmost rigour; the families of Klaus, Berthold and their brother Alexander, their mother, uncles, aunts, cousins, even in-laws and acquaintances, most of whom knew nothing of the conspiracy, old men and children were all rounded up and imprisoned, placed in *Schutzhaft* or, in the case of youngsters, in Party hostels under new names, or given to foster families. It took months of searching after the war to find them. Probably the distant branches of the other conspirators' families were not hounded so relentlessly. Nevertheless the families of Olbricht, von Haeften, Mertz, Goerdeler, von Tresckow, von Hassell, von Hase, Hoepner, Oster, von Dohnanyi, Bonhoeffer, von der Schulenberg, Schwerin von Schwanenfeld, Hansen, von Hofacker, Yorck von Wartenburg, von Moltke, to name only some of those who have appeared in these pages, were arrested and sent to camps.

Meanwhile a 'Special Commission 20.7.1944' set up by Kaltenbrunner, and consisting of some 400 officials, continued interrogating day and night the widening circle of those they discovered were implicated; the fresh information gleaned each twenty-four hours was summarised by an Obersturmbannführer, Kielpinski, and sent to Bormann with a covering note from Kaltenbrunner. It is notable that, despite Himmler's involvement with many of those arrested, his name appears rarely in the reports, and only in favourable contexts. On 22 July, for instance, the Commission commented on the mood of the population: 'The appointment of the Reichsführer-SS as commander of the Home Army is leading to the hope everywhere that now for once everything will be thoroughly "cleared out"; there is a demand for a general purge.'[14] A precisely similar comment appeared two days later: the Reichsführer was seen as 'a strong man'; it was expected that he would 'finally and ruthlessly make a clean sweep internally'.[15] On 25 July Klausing, von Stauffenberg's escort to Führer headquarters on 11 and 15 July, was reported as saying that the bomb had not been detonated on these occasions because the Reichsführer-SS was not present – testimony that is not supported and indeed contradicted by later reports of the Commission. More strikingly, the author of the report, Kielpinski, surmised without evidence: 'It is probable that the two [sic] explosives which von Haeften threw out of the car on the way to the airport after the attempt *were prepared for the attempt on the Reichsführer-SS*' – italics as in the original.[16] It is difficult to see how a second attempt could have been made on anyone after the bomb in the Führer conference had detonated, and Kielpinski did not suggest how either von Stauffenberg or von Haeften might have contrived to make such an attempt.

Those who knew most about the SS flirtation with the opposition and with the west were either protected by Himmler, or said nothing, no doubt realising it would be their death warrant. It is probably significant that

Canaris was arrested by Schellenberg in person. 'Somehow I felt it would be you,' the Admiral said when he opened the door to him, and after the situation had been explained, 'We'll get over this. You must promise me faithfully that within the next three days you will get me an opportunity to talk to Himmler personally.'[17] Evidently this talk took place. Canaris was subjected to interrogation in September, but was treated, at least at first, with unusual respect, and was not physically tortured; he insisted he had never played any part in the opposition. When Oster's secret files on the pre-war opposition conspiracies were discovered, including a few pages from Canaris' diary, 'Gestapo' Müller reprimanded the official concerned for reporting it to a meeting of the 'Special Commission' without informing him first and told him to make no further reference to the find, even to his friends.[18]

Langbehn was also protected. His membership of various opposition groups and his central role as a liaison with the west were mentioned in a few reports, but his connection with Himmler was stated only once in a summary of Goerdeler's evidence. Goerdeler said he had become acquainted with Langbehn through Professor Dr Jesson, at which time Langbehn had told him of his foreign contacts via Switzerland and Sweden, and of his relationship with the Reichsführer-SS. Goerdeler thought him sinister. 'On the one hand his relationship to the Reichsführer-SS had been important, and at the conference in May 1943 Goerdeler stoutly encouraged Langbehn in the view that the initiative for a rescue action could only derive from the Reichsführer-SS. On the other hand the role Langbehn played appeared to him *dangerous*' – italics as in the original. Goerdeler then stated that Langbehn had told him in August–September 1943 of 'the known discussion' between Himmler and Popitz without divulging details. 'I also did not press him because I fully appreciated his discretion.' However, when Goerdeler learned that Langbehn had been told of the plans for a military uprising he had been alarmed. 'I was shocked and asked myself who could have been so indiscreet as to initiate him and went to Popitz. I tried hard to pose questions about the seriousness of his knowledge, and then told him it was certainly all a nonsense, the generals would never act. I did that because I was never completely sure about the personality of Langbehn.'[19] This summary supported Himmler's own version of his contacts with Langbehn and Popitz, namely that he was leading them on in order to discover the ramifications of the plot.

There were virtually no reports detailing Arthur Nebe's role. According to Gisevius, Nebe fled Berlin after hearing of Graf Helldorf's arrest on 24 July. Gisevius fled with him, and thanks to Allen Dulles' efforts on his behalf succeeded eventually in reaching Switzerland. Nebe, however, was picked up in January 1945, interrogated and apparently executed, although there is no confirmation of this. The first mention of Nebe's name in Kaltenbrunner's daily reports to Bormann occurs in a summary of enemy propaganda dated 16 August. The enemy radio station Atlantik

– run by the British Political Warfare Executive (PWE) – had reported on 7 August that in order to keep the public in the dark about the participation of high SS-Führers in the 'peace movement', the rank and position of SS-Obergruppenführer Nebe had not been disclosed; it also reported that his flight had been assisted by other SS-Führers and police officials.[20] On 11 August the Atlantik station asserted that high personalities in the Party, the economy, politics and 'even Waffen-SS Führers' had belonged to the conspiracy.[21] Von Neurath, Schacht, Graf Helldorf and again Nebe were mentioned, and it was suggested that Himmler's second adjutant had been shot on account of his participation in the conspiracy. It is interesting that the Atlantik station broadcasts were so skilfully woven that Bormann and Kaltenbrunner believed there must be an informer at Führer headquarters, and set 200 signals specialists the task of tracing parallel lines which would transmit conversations to unauthorised destinations – without success.[22] However, when Kaltenbrunner came to make a special report on Nebe for Hitler in March the following year, he gave no details of what the police chief had admitted under interrogation apart from sexual relationships with a wide circle of women; apparently he sought to account for his treachery as the result of a thyroid operation undergone in 1943.

The paucity of information in the reports about those most closely connected with Himmler tends to support popular rumour that SS-Oberstgruppenführer Daluege and Obergruppenführer Kaltenbrunner were implicated in the plot – and, if these two, presumably 'Gestapo' Müller as well. Popular rumour also implicated Keitel, von Rundstedt, von Manstein, von Brauchitsch, von Kluge, Halder, Fromm and von Stülpnagel;[23] it is known that nearly all these were involved and it is intriguing to speculate whether Keitel was really of their number. At all events it was the military conspirators and the traditional ruling class generally, the old enemies of the revolution, whom the SS investigators pursued and destroyed by providing the prosecution evidence at the travesties of trials played out in the People's Court under the turncoat communist, Dr Roland Freisler.

The first eight cases, including von Witzleben, Hoepner, Stieff, von Hase and Yorck von Wartenburg, came before the Court on 7 and 8 August. Hitler had given personal instructions about filming to the Deutsche Wochenschau (newsreel) chief, and Freisler, robed in red, played up to the cameras, adopting what one of the stenographers present described as a 'theatrical, brutal and merciless expression – apparently rehearsed before a mirror – like a second Robespierre'. He shouted the accused down if they attempted an explanation, calling them *Lumpen*, traitors and cowardly murderers; finally in a voice 'that must have been heard like a trumpet in the streets outside he declared all eight accused guilty of the most consummate treachery to the Führer, his followers, all that the German *Volk* was and had, to German history, to all German men and women. . . .'[24]

Hitler had decreed that the accused should be hanged within two hours

of sentence, and this too should be filmed for public exhibition. They were taken to the execution chamber of Plötzensee prison in north-west Berlin. It was part of a brick outhouse, furnished with a guillotine, a black dividing curtain, a table for the witnesses, and the executioner's Schnapps, and a wash basin. Eight iron hooks were spaced out along a girder beneath the ceiling. The executioner and his assistants were not strangers to their task: some 2000 victims of the National Socialist state had been beheaded or hanged here since the *Machtergreifung*.

Von Witzleben was the first to be brought in, his hands behind his back and, under the glare of the film lights, hanged with a wire noose. The others were brought in after him one by one. According to an eyewitness, the hangman, known for his humour, had a grin on his face and made witticisms throughout. 'All the accused showed the same fortitude.'[25] The film was processed rapidly and despatched to the Wolfschanze for Hitler's viewing that night, 8/9 August. Such was the spirit of vengeance. Subsequently only the most important victims were filmed as they died; presumably these films too were sent to Führer headquarters, but neither they nor Freisler's exhibitions were shown to the public as the effect on selected audiences made it evident that they had the reverse effect to that intended.

While the interrogations and trials and executions were proceeding, Himmler ordered a round-up of ideological enemies. This had been planned for some time under the codename 'Aktion Gewitter' ('Storm'). The preparatory message went out from Gestapo headquarters, Prinz Albrecht Strasse, to all Gestapo stations on the night of 17 August, signed by Müller:

> RFSS has ordered arrest of all former Reich and Landtag representatives in the Reich of the KPD [Communist Party] and SPD [Social Democratic Party] as well as town councillors of the KPD and SPD. It is immaterial whether there is anything against them at present or not. I extend this arrest-action to the former Party and Union secretaries of the SPD.
>
> The arrest-action must begin simultaneously on 22.8.44 in the early-morning hours. . . .[26]

Those arrested were to be taken into *Schutzhaft*. The only exceptions to be made were those serving in the Gestapo or SD informants' network, those who had become active members of the Party or its affiliates, and those over seventy, or so ill that they were unfit for camp life. The day before the action was due to begin Himmler added all former representatives and town councillors of the Centre (Catholic) Party to the arrest-list, and he requested a short report on the political attitude after the *Machtergreifung* of each individual arrested.[27] The round-up caused alarm in communities throughout the Reich, especially where priests were taken, and the same evening a top-priority message went out from Prinz Albrecht Strasse excluding priests from the action.[28]

The number of those arrested after 20 July has been put as high as 7000; as 'Aktion Gewitter' indicates, most of those rounded up had no direct connection with the conspiracy, but were taken in as a precautionary measure and to indicate to the populace that Himmler meant business. Others were arrested and executed for 'defeatism', but this was nothing new; it had been going on since the first day of the war. The total number of executions officially registered in 1944 was 5764, only 80 more than the official total for 1943.[29] It is uncertain exactly how many were conspirators. Executions of conspirators continued through the early months of 1945 and practically to the end of the war; one authority has put their number at 200.[30] Jürgen Stroop said in his prison cell that the total reached 4500. 'Oh, certainly,' he replied when Moczarski expressed scepticism, 'there was no single garrison in which someone who was guilty or had knowledge of the conspiracy was not found. Each SD office, each branch of the Security Police had to neutralise conspirators, especially those who had camouflaged themselves perfectly. . . .'[31] Moczarski suggested that what Stroop meant was the opportunity was seized to get rid of political enemies, prosecute personal vendettas or remove obstacles to promotion; Stroop did not disagree. The numbers of those executed for their part in the plot, like the numbers who took part or knew about it, will never be established.

Stroop himself was responsible for the arrest of von Kluge. He kept him under continual surveillance in the weeks immediately after the attempt, and found he was maintaining secret radio contact with the British under the guise of fulfilling Red Cross agreements about prisoners of war. On 15 August Himmler called Stroop to tell him that Hitler was replacing von Kluge, who was to be arrested. By Stroop's account he did this the next day as the General was on his way to a meeting with British representatives. After two days of interrogation during which von Kluge denied everything, Stroop left him alone with a pistol to take the honourable way out. He refused, merely writing to Hitler, protesting his loyalty and begging him to end the war. Stroop shot him through the head – thus his account to Moczarski – giving it out, on Himmler's instructions, as suicide.[32]

Later that year, as is well known, Rommel was confronted with a similar choice after recovering from his wounds. For the sake of his family he agreed to take poison. His death was announced as a heart attack and he was given a state funeral attended by von Rundstedt as Hitler's representative. Many other leading figures had already committed suicide without prompting, to save themselves from the Gestapo.

On the day before von Kluge's 'suicide', Himmler wrote a long letter to the chief of Ahnenerbe, SS-Sturmbannführer Wolfram Sievers, and his chief academic, SS-Oberführer Professor Dr Walther Wüst. It concerned a recent learned book on German folklore and justice which had been sent to him the previous month, and it is evident from his detailed comments

that he had read it thoroughly. He believed, he wrote, that their forebears enacted their legal ordinances, including marriages, on the ancestor stone at the great burial place of the *Sippe*. 'This is in accordance with the customs of our forebears and their belief: the dead ancestors experienced everything and everyone had to be answerable before them.'

Most of his comments concerned marriage and procreation. Thus he drew attention to a passage about an ancient custom whereby girls went to the ancestor stone at midnight to obtain a man:

> Here I must relate a custom manifestly still alive in our time about the year 1930:
>
> In Kiel a girl bore a child in hospital. To the question, who the father of the child was, she said it was a child of the stone. When it was looked into more closely it was found to concern the following old custom:
>
> If there was a girl in a village who had reached marriageable age and not found a man, the father went out on a moon-dark night, that is at new moon, with the girl and the villagers. The girl was placed on the dolmen [stone table] or ancestral burial, the villagers [*Bauern aus dem Dorfe*] stood in a wide circle around this stone, face outward. The father had spoken beforehand with a villager, thus with one from the blood-community. This man took himself from the ring to the ancestral burial and coupled with the girl. The love and sexual act took place on the ancestral burial.
>
> The interpretation of this is: no good blood may die out without bearing fruit. However, the child must come to such a daughter from a man of good blood from the village and blood-community. What was done was no casual act, but took place in the sight of the ancestors and on the grave of the ancestors.[33]

Referring to another passage about bridal pairs going to the 'bridal stone' at new moon, he said that research with wild and domestic animals would be necessary to find out whether the new moon was indeed a period of special fecundity. Finally, after discussing the etymology of the 'Heisser' stone mentioned in the book, whose origins he believed lay in the word *heischen* or the Bavarian *der Heiss*, he speculated on the origins of the *roter* (or 'red') stone: red, he wrote, always symbolised law or justice:

> The executioner had a red robe, the courts were decked with red velvet or red earth. I believe that in some areas where the material is to be found, the *Gerichtsstein* [Court-of-justice stone] was of red sandstone or similar rock. In the same way I believe that in general the *Gerichtsstein* or *heissen Stein* was known as the *roter Stein* or *roden Stein*.
>
> This significance of red and justice and its interplay would be an important research project for the Ahnenerbe to tackle after the war.[34]

Himmler had always appeared the most powerful figure under Hitler. It is impossible to say whether he was in practice, and meaningless to ask since he was never prepared to use his power directly to change the course of events; he amassed it to garner more as others amass fortunes

(*) HH in his acts w 2nd mother (~~[illegible]~~?) he plays out a scene on a symbolic stone. They conceive. (~~[illegible]~~?) ~~[illegible]~~

Häschen Potthast

and lay them up in securities and bank vaults. He infiltrated and formed alliances and when the time was ripe made spectacular take-overs, and hungered for more empires to topple and dreamed of unlimited authority in a world of Saga, but he did not, it seems he could not, flex the vast network of interlocking force he controlled, except on behalf of his Führer. In this he was Hitler's most inspired and only indispensable choice. Goebbels was brilliant, Speer a technological genius, Bormann the consummate reptile, but without 'der treue Heinrich', the right-hand man who wanted to know everything and manage and control everything, but lacked the decision or ultimate resolve, probably even the desire to be more than the right-hand man, it is difficult to see how Hitler's Reich and his paladins could have survived thus far.

He was not, of course, 'der treue Heinrich' as his flirtations with the opposition and the west demonstrate. Yet neither was he the potential King Heinrich. Had he wished to take over the Reich he could scarcely have had more favourable conditions than those immediately preceding 20 July. It could be said it was the west's failure to treat with him that kept him loyal. But a real quest for supreme power would not have been diverted by the attitude of the enemy. The course of the 20 July conspiracy seems to indicate that he was prepared, as ever, to watch the game and toy with treason, but when the moment came he failed to act and simply allowed power to flow back to its original source. Probably he was relieved inwardly that, by sparing Hitler, Providence had taken the decision out of his hands; he could continue to serve his Führer.

After 20 July his importance as perpetual second man became more marked. His powers had increased dramatically. The Army in disgrace had lost whatever moral and political authority it had retained to that date. By contrast Himmler, whose Waffen-SS grew to thirty-eight divisions – at least in name – had been entrusted with command of the Home Army and with raising the new 'people's divisions'; behind all his titles as Reichsführer-SS and Chief of the German Police, Minister of the Interior, Chief of Army Armaments and commander of the Replacement Army, he was Minister of War in all but name, overall chief of intelligence, chief of the concentration camp labour and industrial complex, and had taken over responsibility for the V rocket production programme; he also retained all racial–colonial responsibilities administered by his Main Office, RKF (Consolidation of German Nationhood), Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle, RuSHA and Dienststelle Heissmeyer. If these decreased in importance as the boundaries of the Reich shrank, his responsibilities for defence increased, first with the formation that autumn of a home militia called the Volkssturm, then with command of armies in the field; at one point he styled himself Supreme Commander, West.

The prestige and influence of the official heir apparent, the Reichsmarschall, Hermann Göring, had fallen away completely by this time and Himmler was considered and undoubtedly considered himself the obvious

successor to Hitler; even Hitler appeared to concede this by enlarging his responsibilities to such an extent, and that November he allowed him to make the big speech in his stead at the annual Bürgerbräu celebrations. Hitler judged him more or less correctly. Himmler continued to toy with treason, but he never grasped it. There were plenty of excuses he could make to himself. Why seize power when the west would no more deal with him than with Hitler? Providence had given him a sign. He owed everything he was to Hitler. His honour was his loyalty; how could he of all people betray the Führer? According to all who knew him closely he simply lacked the power of decision.

He was also exposed to the emotional currents in wake of the failed plot. These radiated as much from SS and Party members enraged at the attempted 'stab in the back' and demanding a final cleansing of the reactionary and 'intellectual' stables, as from the Führer and the leaders rallying round him in desperate defence of the power and ideology system that had brought them their positions. In defeat against a world of enemies, the system's ratchet towards extremes increased. From outside with hindsight it is evident that whatever rationality remained was distorted between these tremendous forces and apprehension of defeat. Himmler proved, as always, the supreme conformist.

He and Goebbels, less than twenty years before both ragged, wandering activists for a semi-proscribed, minority cause, putting up at the poor homes of Party members wherever they spoke, became the key figures in the last stand of the system that had grown miraculously from their efforts. Hitler had disappeared from public view. Only the image Goebbels had created of him remained potent. It was Goebbels, appointed Commissioner for 'Total War', and Himmler, in his role as drummer for the new divisions, who sought to mobilise all resources for the war effort and recruit all males at home – then women and girls – for the defence of the Fatherland.

Both took advantage of the propaganda value of the so-called Morgenthau Plan adopted as official allied policy by Roosevelt and Churchill at a conference in Quebec that September. This foresaw, not simply the partition of Germany after the war, but the dismantling of the heavy and electro-chemical industries of the Ruhr and the Saar and the conversion of the country into a land 'primarily agricultural and pastoral in its character'. The aim, natural enough in view of German rearmament in the inter-war years, and indeed before the First World War, was to make it impossible for her to arm a third time for European and world domination. That at least was the declared aim, and in the climate created by the German drive for *Lebensraum* it was more reasonable than it might appear with hindsight – especially, perhaps, as it was precisely what Hitler had intended for eastern Europe. However, the author of the plan, the US Treasury Secretary, Henry Morgenthau, was a Jew; together with inferences about the size of population which a deindustrialised Germany could be expected to support, this was a gift for Goebbels and Himmler in their drive to recruit and whip up

a fanatical spirit of defence of the Fatherland. The German press was soon reporting that Roosevelt had 'amplified the plans of his bosom friend, the finance Jew, Morgenthau, and developed a programme of pitiless extermination'.[35]

Goebbels and Himmler were the most visible symbols of defiance. Bormann played his part in the shadows at Hitler's side, filtering the information that reached him, controlling the Gauleiters and the Party apparatus. Speer drove the war economy in face of the crippling onslaughts from the air and fostered group fantasy with production forecasts as over-optimistic as Göring's in better times. Göring and Dönitz shed men from their services to fill the gaps in the fighting fronts and gave Hitler moral support for the strategy of fighting for time until the new weapons could be produced. Keitel relayed the orders of the once greatest warlord of all time to surrender no inch of ground. Von Ribbentrop put out vain peace feelers east and west. These formed Hitler's war council, more separately than together, during the last dying spasms of his Reich; they drew heart from his will – or recognised that there was no alternative. He responded to the fantasy created: the jet fighter aircraft programme that would put a roof over the Reich . . . the new U-boats that would wrest the initiative back from the western allies . . . the V-2 rockets that would pound the British into a conciliatory mood . . . the points of friction between the east and west that would break the enemy coalition apart . . . the miracle of the Seven Years War that would be repeated at the blackest hour for the Reich . . .

For all his public and private assertions of faith in ultimate victory. Himmler was riddled with doubt. Kersten's fingers had relieved him of the worst of the spasms that brought him to his bed in early September, but his private secretary, Brandt, saw him pacing away the night of 9/10 September, unable to sleep.[36] His responsibilities were greater than any single individual could cope with, and the situation was desperate: the western allies had broken out of the invasion pocket and swept across France, had liberated Paris, Brussels and Antwerp and were within striking distance of the Rhine; over that barrier lay the industrial region of the Ruhr, whose loss would signify the effective end of the war. In the east the Red Army thrust towards the Baltic had cut off Army Group North, which was fighting its own separate, defensive battle. Earlier, on 24 July Marshal Rokossovskii's Army Group had overrun the extermination camp at Majdanek; for the first time the unbelievable had become visible. Photographs of gas chambers and crematoria and living skeletons in the camp had shocked the world. In the Balkans on 23 August Rumania had defected from the German alliance and surrendered unconditionally to the Russians. This had fatally weakened Hungary's alliance with Germany. Yet Hungarian oil was vital. Meanwhile at the end of August Slovak partisans had staged a rising potentially more dangerous than the Warsaw revolt. Was Himmler's mind circling tiredly in search of an exit from the tightening noose? Was he perhaps seeing von

Witzleben and the other seven conspirators of 20 July struggling on thin wire in the execution chamber of Plötzensee jail the day before?

On 12 September Kersten, who had begun to use his special relationship as Himmler's 'Magic Buddha' to persuade him to release certain prisoners from the camps, petitioned him on behalf of a group of twenty-seven priests. In the course of the discussion Himmler confessed to the mistake the Nazis had made in attacking the Church; it had proved stronger than they – the Party – but he wondered if, despite all he had attempted against it, there was still room for him inside. Agreeing to release the group, he said, 'When I am dead, will these priests also pray for my soul?'[37]

Four days later he received General Vlassov, the leader of the Russian Liberation Army whom he had spoken of in such sneering tones as a Slavic traitor at the Posen Gauleiter conference the previous October. Since then Berger, Ohlendorf, Schellenberg and other senior SS officers had talked to him, so dramatically had Germany's position deteriorated, and finally Himmler had obtained Hitler's permission to incorporate Vlassov's anti-Soviet formations in the eastern fighting front. The meeting had been fixed for 21–23 July; put off in the aftermath of the bomb plot, it eventually took place on 16 September at Himmler's field headquarters in East Prussia. The two met 'under four eyes', as was Himmler's invariable custom when dealing with important matters, with only an interpreter present.

Vlassov emerged highly gratified by what he had achieved and very surprised. He had expected to meet a bloodthirsty grand inquisitor *à la* Beria, he told his Chief of Staff. Instead he had felt he was talking to a decent, well-brought-up bourgeois.

> Quiet, modest, nothing of the gangster boss like Dr Ley. On the contrary, he was none too self-assured. Not a word about *Herrenmenschen*. No mention of Jews. He more or less apologised for having so long been taken in by *Untermensch* theories. I do not think he is intelligent. He seemed limited, narrow, pedantic. He has a farm – so he is a peasant like myself. He is fond of animals.[38]

Himmler apparently accorded Vlassov full rights as an ally and agreed to him raising ten divisions in the common cause against Stalin. However seriously he meant this remarkable about-turn, Himmler's pact with Vlassov soon fell into the sand of inter-ministerial rivalries and suspicions, and was overtaken by the speed of the German collapse.

At the end of September, Himmler travelled to Bratislava to put his stamp on the suppression of 'Free Slovakia', by that time under overt Soviet control. Originally he had sent the faithful Gottlob Berger to put down the rising as von dem Bach was engaged in Warsaw; now he superseded him with the HSSPF in the region, a typically hardened example named Hermann Höfle, and furnished him with Dirlewanger and his criminals, the blood and ashes of Warsaw reeking in close memory, five Security Police Kommandos, the 18th SS-Panzergrenadierdivision Horst Wessel and the 14th (Galician)

SS-Waffen-Grenadierdivision. In October these formations visited the horrors of a 'rigorous' SS action on the region – as Himmler put it on another occasion that September, 'I will cover you. You can be absolutely certain I will never reprove anyone for excess!'[39] Smoke of burning homes, mass graves of civilians and soldiers, roads jammed with refugees or columns of fearful men, women and children being marched towards internment and forced labour marked the advance of the SS Panzer and police units. By the end of October 'Free Slovakia' had been crushed as a unified force.

On his way back to his field headquarters in early October, Himmler spent a day with Häschen Potthast and his two children at the house on the Obersalzberg. Next day he confided to Bormann that he had accepted no telephone calls but had devoted himself to 'hanging pictures, doing things about the house and playing with the children the whole day long'. He had legalised his paternity of the boy Helge, then aged two, and the baby girl in a document dated 12 September – whether by coincidence or not the day Kersten recorded him wondering whether the Church still had room for him – and had made himself co-guardian of the two children with Häschen.[40] Martin Bormann's wife Gerda, one of Häschen's neighbours in the complex of Party leaders' homes above Berchtesgaden, provides a glimpse of the family in a letter she wrote to her husband on 21 September:

> Helge is a lot taller than our Hartmut but much slimmer and thinner. In his movement and general build he is as much like Heinrich as Hartmut is like you, but I can't see the facial likeness any more. The little girl, however, is ridiculously like her father. Häschen has some photos from Heinrich's childhood where he looks exactly the same. The baby has grown big and sturdy, and is so sweet! All the afternoon she was lying in her basket, sleeping or playing with her little hands. Helge has got some nice carts and a blue wheelbarrow, all the work of the wounded soldiers at Hohenlychen, and the boys were rushing round with them the whole afternoon long. With Helge it is obvious that playfellows of his own age are something new to him. . . .[41]

Häschen, Gerda wrote, was very pleased with the house – completed only recently – and was enchanted with its situation.

Since at least July Himmler had been occupied with the idea of raising a mass levy as an auxiliary to the regular forces for defence of the homeland; it is not clear whether this owed more to the representations of the Army General Staff who were pressing for the same thing, to a defence militia raised in East Prussia by the Gauleiter, Erich Koch, or to parallels he himself had drawn from German history. In the event Bormann ensured that the force, to be known as the Volkssturm, would be raised and administered by the Gauleiters. Himmler, in keeping with his new, heightened persona as spokesman for the Führer and the spirit of defiance, was appointed overall head. And when the scheme was announced over Grossdeutschen radio on 18 October, it was he who explained it to the public.

The broadcast was from East Prussia before an audience of Erich Koch's Volkssturm. Photographs of the hall show Himmler before banked microphones at the speaker's rostrum, an improbable figure under a giant German eagle and swastika banners, flanked by Keitel and Erich Koch, their martial bearing and jutting jaws emphasising the homeliness of his appearance. Surely – this is an impostor.

Proceedings opened with choruses of 'Volk ans Gewehr!' ('People to arms!') after which an announcer read the Führer decree: 'After five years of the hardest struggle and in consequence of our European allies breaking faith, the enemy stands before or at the German borders. He exerts his forces to destroy our Reich and eradicate the German *Volk* and its social order. His final goal is the extermination of the German people. . . .'

Coming to details, the decree prescribed that Volkssturm units to defend 'the native soil' were to be raised in each *Gau* by the Gauleiter; the Reichsführer-SS, as commander of the Replacement Army, was responsible for their military organisation, training, arming and deployment in battle.

After the announcement Himmler started his speech:[42] 'Volkssturm men! Today 131 years ago on the evening of 18 October 1813, after the bloody and extraordinarily changeable battle near Leipzig, the people finally emerged victorious. By this success Germany's soil was swept clean of Napoleon's apparently invincible armed power. . . .' He went on to describe how in the spring of that year the Prussian Landsturm had been raised from ordinary villagers and townspeople, 'armed with every variety of weapon from flintlocks with and without bayonet, spears, pickaxes, pitchforks, swords, scythes . . . etc.' and formed into battalions of fanatical freedom-fighters:

> With the words, 'Fatherland! Fatherland!' the Landwehr and Landsturm attacked the better-armed, -trained and battle-hardened enemy in all regions, and over the course of months accompanied by many reverses, drove the French enemy from the Prussian lands. The climax came in the battle of Leipzig famously fought to the end by chiefly Prussian and Austrian soldiers. The Landsturm in half a year had created from an allegedly hopeless situation the preconditions for the Army's important strategic victory at Leipzig, which again was the foundation for the liberation of the Fatherland and winning the whole war.
>
> Now, on 18 October 1944, memorial day of the People of Leipzig, our Führer and highest warlord, Adolf Hitler, calls all German men from sixteen to sixty years of age still at home and capable of bearing arms to the German Volkssturm for the defence of the soil of the homeland.

He went on to describe the very difficult situation of their enemies, who had to force an entry into Germany but whose forces were overstretched everywhere.

> Bitter is the extremity of hunger in the Russian lands, whose villages and towns are bled and empty of people. Every method of Jewish–Bolshevic pettiness and

terror have to be employed to drive the masses, from lads to greybeards, to the battlefield. . . .

Also for our western enemies the war is becoming ever more difficult. In August, certainly, through the superiority of their air force, they succeeded in breaking through our front in Normandy with the heaviest sacrifices. However, in the course of the last six weeks and against their expectations, the west front has been re-established over a length of 900 kilometres, fortified and made defensively strong. . . .

At the same time in Warsaw, capital of betrayed Poland, the resistance movement burst out in rebellion. They believed Germany had lost the strength to break the insubordination of this city of millions behind the German front. In eight weeks of fighting which cost the Polish people over 200,000 dead and the complete annihilation of their metropolis, the uprising was quashed. It was thanks to German humanity as well, to be sure, as the later prudence of the Polish General Bor, disgracefully deceived and abandoned by his allies, that the last quarter million Polish men, women and children in the middle of the cauldron were enabled to escape certain death in the street-fighting of this blazing hell.

Jewry, freemasonry and democracy, he went on, using trickery and bribery, had been responsible for their allies Bulgaria, Rumania and Finland, laying down their arms; they had thereby committed national suicide. In the west, American soldiers questioned themselves more each day why they should be fighting Germany. The British Tommy 'longed urgently' for the end of the war his leaders had promised him for the beginning of October, the middle of October, the end of October . . . Still he had to fight on. Meanwhile in Germany 'oath-breaking, disloyal and cowardly traitors and defeatists' had conspired against the Führer. Fate had intervened and preserved him for his *Volk*. The Army and its officer corps had been pained by the scandal, yet the German martial tradition was age-old, its eternal models 'great spirits and noble heroes like Prince Eugen and Frederick the Great'.

He passed to the future; new squadrons and parachute divisions would be raised for the Luftwaffe. The Navy, 'unbroken in battle', would tackle the enemy with new means, 'the marriage of the highest technology and unconditionally brave crews' – his code for the new types of U-boat with high underwater speed, which Speer was urging through production.

In this present defensive phase of the war, he went on, 'the worthy women and men' who despite the bombing terror had achieved superhuman performances in farm and factory had to create an impregnable fortification system with spade, shovel and pickaxe. And beyond this it was necessary that the *Volk* support the Wehrmacht through the establishment of the Volkssturm.

As formerly in the War of Liberation the Landssturm, so today the Volkssturm has the task of seizing the enemy fanatically everywhere he breaks through to our home soil, whether by a thrust on land, whether by a parachute drop from the air, and containing him and if possible wiping him out. Our enemy must learn:

each kilometre he wants to advance into our country will cost him torrents of blood. Each town block, each village, each farmstead, each trench, each copse, each wood will be defended by men, young lads and greybeards and – if it has to be – by women and girls.

Even in the area they believe they have conquered, the German will to resistance will flame up again and again in their rear and, like the werewolves, death-defying volunteers will damage the enemy and cut off his life-lines. *Our cursed enemy* must discover and realise that a break-in to Germany, even if it is anywhere successful, will cost the attacker sacrifices equivalent to national suicide. The *Volk* draft will take over the task of helping the Wehrmacht in threatened areas so that they are enabled to arm and regroup and attack the enemy again.

His mention of werewolves was again a code; he had commissioned his former Highest SSPF Ukraine and HSSPF South Russia, SS-Obergruppenführer Hans Prützmann, to set up a secret organisation, Werwolf, to keep National Socialism alive underground if the country were occupied. According to Stroop, who had been initiated by Prützmann the previous month, 'soldiers and civilians, SS people and non-Party, youths and girls, even women and children' were to be schooled in sabotage, the liquidation of enemy agents, poisoning food and water and attacks on transport.[43] It is evident from a letter Himmler wrote to his HSSPF West in Düsseldorf on the day following his radio broadcast that the writ ran to liquidation of German collaborators. Enemy press reports indicated that in many of the places occupied by the Anglo-Americans the population was 'behaving unworthily', he wrote. Therefore he instructed the HSSPF that the guilty persons should be drawn to account directly these places were reconquered, and: 'Already now our organisation behind the American front has to make an educational effect by the execution of the death sentence on traitors.'[44]

He continued his speech to the people as he was wont to address his SS men: they must be armed inwardly with the timeless virtues which alone guaranteed victory. And he gave them 'The new oath':

First, we swear that, like our fathers, we want to be loyal, loyal to the Führer, whom the Lord God has sent us, loyal to the Reich which unites all German stems for centuries and that is and will be as it was formerly the regulating power of the European continent. Loyal to the *Volk* and thereby to ourselves, because we are the most valuable elements to defend and preserve the eternal life of the Germanic peoples, its women and children, and therewith its blood that has created so much that is noble for man.

The second promise was to be obedient to all orders from the Führer and superiors, the third to know that the most powerful forces a people could muster were believing hearts and steadfastness; fourthly they were to declare that they would never entertain any false hopes:

> We have learned from the very mouths of our enemies what we can expect, the destruction of our country, the clearance of our woods, the dissolution of our economy, the annihilation of our towns, the burning down of our villages and the extermination [*Ausrottung*] of our peoples. . . .
>
> Never and nowhere are Volkssturm men permitted to capitulate. If at any time a responsible leader believes himself to be in a hopeless position where he must give up the struggle, the usual custom of our brave Navy is valid for the Volkssturm: he must give up the command to that subordinate – even if he be the youngest – who has the will to continue the fight.

He prophesied harder tests in the coming weeks and months, but 'armed outwardly and inwardly, inspired by sacred belief and filled with fanatical determination to spare neither our own nor foreign blood if the welfare of the nation requires it' they would endure and prove unconquerable. And he ended, 'We have the deepest confidence and are convinced that at the end of all difficulties, all sacrifices, all sorrows and struggles, the Almighty will give the Führer and his *Volk* hard-earned victory.'

Erich Koch followed with a short address reinforcing these themes, pledging 'All our belief, all our love, all our strength and all our hate . . .' finally leading that deep-throated, three-fold roar that echoes down the years of 'Adolf Hitler, the Führer of all Germans . . . *Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil!*'

The following week the press carried reports of Himmler receiving Army and Waffen-SS men in his special train and bestowing on them in the name of the Führer the 'Close combat' clasp in gold.[45] Linking Himmler with 'the bravest of the brave' and continuing to feature him prominently in the press in this and other martial roles, Goebbels created an impression of Himmler's ascendancy in the councils of the Reich and suggested that he was speaking and acting for the silent and invisible Führer. Whether this was connected with Himmler's continuing attempts to interest the west in a separate peace, or whether it should be taken at face value as the propaganda of total war and defiance of the enemy is unclear. But certainly Himmler made other attempts to open negotiations with the British government in the latter part of October. Wolff's SS and police chief in northern Italy, SS-Obergruppenführer Dr Wilhelm Harster, was one of his emissaries; his go-between was an Italian industrialist with English big-business connections named Franco Marinotti. Their meeting took place at Harster's villa near Lake Como in the afternoon of 24 October.

The offer followed the pattern of SS dealing from the beginning, an undisguised mixture of blackmail and appeals to self-interest – in this case to the financial–industrial interest of the western business community in having a Europe freed from communism. It could be said that this message had not changed in all the years of Nazi power. But first there was the threat: Harster told Marinotti of Hitler's plans for a scorched-earth policy, specifically the destruction of all industry as the German fronts withdrew. However, if the allies were willing to negotiate – and he spoke 'with the

approval of the Reichsführer Himmler' – he could offer them the twenty-five German divisions in Italy to maintain order in central Europe (that is stave off Communism) directly hostilities ended along the western front. In return the allies should guarantee the inviolability of the Reich area and its population.[46]

Marinotti was given a safe pass across the Swiss border and on 30 October handed his report of the conversation to the British Consul in Zurich, who forwarded it to London. The offer would have been refused without its provenance; that ensured rejection. Marinotti then approached Roosevelt's chief of intelligence in Berne through an official of the Catholic Church – with equal lack of success.[47]

Himmler's failure to understand the loathing his name inspired in the west was due to his National Socialist vision, aided no doubt by wishful thinking. The hatred for him was propaganda whipped up by the Jews around Roosevelt and Churchill, but once western financiers woke up to the frightful danger of Bolshevism facing Europe they would ensure that the propaganda changed direction; then he might look forward to the British and American press hailing him and the SS as saviours of Europe.[48] This was his hope and it was fuelled by Harster's report which, according to Allen Dulles, gave a distorted view of his own response. Harster claimed that he (Dulles) had Roosevelt's mandate to make contact with SS circles since only the SS could be of value to the United States in its desire to disengage from Europe in order to concentrate its forces against Japan. Contact should be resumed after the re-election of President Roosevelt.[49] Viewed from this angle Himmler's call for fanatical resistance had a certain rationale and was not at all inconsistent with his peace overtures.

As for the odium surrounding his name, Kersten mentioned this during a treatment that winter, and Himmler replied with justification that the west accepted Stalin as an ally, and worse could be said of him.[50] The reversal of US policy over the representation of communists and communism on radio and film which had taken place on the United States' entry into the war – as indeed had happened in Great Britain earlier – the way in which the guidelines about the depiction of their new ally had been followed faithfully, and after the war the employment in western intelligence services of SS officers wanted for war crimes lend added support to Himmler's 'real' view of the world. There is much reason to believe that it was not Hitler and Himmler so much as German military–industrial expansionism that the western allies had set their minds against. They believed that Germany had to be defeated and had to acknowledge her defeat before her leading caste could be re-educated to join the (western) family of nations.[51] There was also the very real fear that any hint of negotiation with Germany might provoke Stalin into changing sides once again. It was these considerations which probably carried greater weight than the emotional momentum of hate and horror, and doomed all Himmler's efforts to failure.

Yet the emotion was real – if not as decisive as the *Realpolitik* – and

it is probable that Himmler never admitted this to himself. At all events his attitude towards the Jews did not seem to change; only his policy altered with the changing circumstances: on the one hand Auschwitz and other remaining extermination camps were vulnerable to the next Russian advance; on the other hand he needed all the labourers he could muster, chiefly for a line of anti-tank ditches and fortifications known as the East Wall to hold the Red Army before the Reich. These two factors dictated that the gassing should end, but precisely when he gave the order to stop is uncertain. The Jewish Sonderkommando at Auschwitz–Birkenau got wind of the coming change in early October and, knowing that it meant the end for them, revolted at rollcall on 7 October, throwing themselves on the guard. All were mown down with machine-gun fire. However, extermination at Birkenau continued alongside selection for the labour gangs until the end of October. It was then run down and the demolition of the gas chambers and crematoria and the destruction of camp records began.[52] This probably started earlier at other camps in former Poland.

Höss, in his memoirs, placed Himmler's order to 'discontinue the Jew-exterminations' in the autumn of 1944.[53] SS-Standartenführer Kurt Becher, chief negotiator in the bizarre attempt to barter Jews for trucks, placed it between mid-September and mid-October. His mission to Turkey had led to meetings with representatives of American Jewry in Switzerland, and an agreement to release Hungarian Jews to the Swiss in return for foreign exchange payments – 50 Swiss Francs for each ordinary Jew, 500 Francs for 'prominents' which, according to his testimony at Nuremberg, caused him to persuade Himmler to issue the order forbidding further extermination.[54]

Himmler's aim in bartering Jews for Swiss Francs remains uncertain. It is usually assumed he was playing a double game, on the one hand opening a line of communication to Roosevelt for another attempt at peace negotiations with the west, on the other hand covering himself from Hitler's and Bormann's wrath by presenting it as a means of gaining foreign exchange for the war effort.[55] Certainly he was trying desperately to make contact with both western governments at this period. Not only were there his attempts via Marinotti in Italy and Allen Dulles in Switzerland but he was seeking to persuade the imprisoned Goerdeler to appeal to Churchill via his Swedish contact Jacob Wallenberg and the Zionist leader Dr Chaim Weizmann, and was also trying to reach Churchill via the Swedish engineer Dahlerus, whom Göring had used in 1939 in the last-minute efforts to keep Great Britain out of the war. In addition he was preserving Popitz, Langbehn, Haushofer and other members of the conspiracy with useful western contacts from the death sentence, and was accumulating a collection of important hostages, especially Jews believed to be rich or influential. One was Frau Glück, the US-born sister of New York's Mayor, La Guardia. She was resident in Hungary and during the round-up of Hungarian Jews earlier that summer he had ordered her preserved from transportation to Auschwitz and

kept ready to hand in a special camp for 'possible political purposes'.[56]

According to Schellenberg Himmler failed to realise that the release of Jews was important for Germany's foreign policy – he meant relations with the west which he was trying to foster – and seemed concerned only with the effect it would have on Hitler and the Party.[57] Kersten also represented Himmler as terrified of Hitler's response were he to permit a wholesale release of Jews, and Bormann, he said, was ready to stab him in the back.[58]

Bormann's letters to his wife do not give this impression. On 25 October he described an evening at Führer headquarters with Himmler during which they had both been reduced to tears of laughter by his other two guests, Wolff's successor and Himmler's long-term favourite, Hermann Fegelein – who had married the sister of Hitler's mistress, Eva Braun, that summer – and Hitler's military adjutant, General Wilhelm Burgdorf; 'they are like a pair of naughty boys,' Bormann wrote. 'You can imagine what fun we had.'[59] And at the end of the month he told her that at his request 'Uncle Heinrich' was about to be appointed Commander-in-Chief Army Group Upper Rhine 'to put things in order'.[60]

It has been suggested that in proposing him for this post Bormann was trying to ruin Himmler by removing him from the immediate vicinity of Führer headquarters and having him appointed above his competence. This would have been a strange thing to do at such a crisis for the system; in fact Himmler appears to have been the obvious choice. He had been concerning himself all autumn with the strengthening of the West Wall, was commander of the Replacement Army, chief public spokesman for 'fanatical' defence of the homeland, and as a leading member of the regime had a personal stake in ensuring that the Rhine defences held.

Whether Himmler's suspicions of Bormann as revealed to Kersten were the result of his own guilty conscience after the arrival of the first small batch of Jews in Switzerland in November or an excuse for indecision, or whether suspicion was endemic and necessary at Hitler's court – whether he simply knew his man too well – there can be no doubt that he was restrained from making large gestures of mercy for the remaining Jews to redeem himself in western eyes by the fear of what Bormann, Goebbels and von Ribbentrop would be able to make of such a reversal of a basic Nazi tenet. Equally there can be no doubt that he lacked the moral courage to brave his Führer's anger. At the same time all his covert moves and feelers suggest that, behind his rhetoric of fighting to the last to preserve the Fatherland, he was seeking to preserve himself, if necessary at the expense of Führer and Party. This was the tenor of the message conveyed to the British Embassy in Stockholm by Dahlerus that winter. Undoubtedly Himmler was able to convince himself that this was the best and only way now open to save Germany and Europe since the SS was the only force capable of preserving the continent from Bolshevism. Yet it was not a card with any meaning in the world outside his imagination. Moreover the frictions in the

enemy coalition from which he hoped so much actually worked against him: Dahlerus' approach and the prospect of garbled versions of it reaching the Russians and Americans caused Churchill to become 'seriously alarmed' and to prohibit further discussions.[61]

Thus at the height of his apparent power in the Reich Himmler was locked into the system which had made him. The high gearing of control by Führer will and the ideological gyro which together had made possible the Party's and the nation's successes against unprepared enemies could not be disengaged simply because the world had been aroused. Schellenberg, Kersten and Ohlendorf might complain of Himmler's indecisiveness, but he was also caught in the machine he had helped to create, whose directional momentum was stronger than any individual however highly placed.

This applied to the destruction of the Jews. His order to cease the extermination had less consequence than the necessary dismantling of the killing factories before the Russian advance. Even if he had wished it he could not have erased the effects of years of indoctrination. His order had no effect on Eichmann's sense of mission, no effect on the desensitised camp Kommandants and guards; if Jews were not to be destroyed directly, they could still be worked and starved to death. Of course this did not apply only to Jews: the whole camp labour–industrial complex under Pohl which consumed workers as an expendable energy resource was raised to heightened tempo by the demand for production to stave off defeat, or by that deeper urge noted by Höss for death. A survivor of both the Auschwitz and Ravensbrück work regimes, Madame Vaillant-Couturier, expressed it in similar terms at Nuremberg: 'the systematic and implacable urge to use human beings as slaves and to kill them when they could work no more'.[62]

A survivor of Buchenwald camp, Dr Victor Dupont, detailed the same phenomenon: until autumn 1944, he stated, labour squads and individuals who had become unfit for even the lightest work were sent to Auschwitz for liquidation, then – and it is apparent this must have coincided with the run-down of the Auschwitz death factory – the killing was done in the sick bay of the camp itself. As numbers grew a special block, 61, was reserved for it.

> all those nicknamed 'Mussulmans' on account of their appearance were collected in this block. We never saw them without their blankets over their shoulders. They were unfit for even the lightest work. They all had to go through Block 61. The death toll varied daily from a minimum of 10 to about 200 in Block 61. The execution was performed by injecting phenol into the heart in the most brutal manner. The bodies were then carted to the crematorium. . . .[63]

Dupont went on to describe how even the internees' remains were exploited:

> The ashes resulting from the cremations were thrown into the excrement pit and served to fertilise the fields around Buchenwald. I add this detail

> because it struck me vividly at the time. . . . Work, whatever it might be, was the internee's only chance of survival. As soon as they were no longer of any possible use they were done for.[64]

Increasingly that autumn and winter as the camps, mine-workings and industrial undertakings in the east were closed down before the Russian advance the work-slaves were evacuated on foot and death occurred on the march from hunger, exhaustion and exposure, from blows for those who dropped out, from the wholesale shooting of groups too weak or ill to continue.

This was also the fate of thousands of Jews who might have survived if Himmler's order to cease extermination had been observed in the same spirit as the original directives for genocide. The majority of European Jews who had escaped the net so far were in Hungary. After the mass deportations to Auschwitz organised by Eichmann earlier in the year, the Hungarian government had refuse co-operation and shipments had been brought to an end in August. By October, with the Red Army approaching Budapest and the government about to follow the Rumanian example and secede from the German alliance, Hitler staged a coup which brought the Nazi-style, anti-semitic Arrow Cross organisation to power. Immediately Eichmann returned to Budapest, summoned the leader of the Jewish community and demanded 50,000 able-bodied Jews for work on the South-east Wall – fortifications before Vienna – and the fighter-aeroplane programme in the Reich. This time, he said, they would be deported on foot since transportation facilities were needed for other purposes. Both Becher and another of Himmler's special 'resettlement commissioners', Dieter Wisliceny, also engaged in negotiating Jews for foreign currency and merchandise, stated afterwards that Eichmann's purpose was still to render Hungary *judenfrei*, if not by extermination, then by deportation to labour and concentration camps. This seems to be confirmed by a letter written by Hitler's plenipotentiary in Hungary, Edmund Veesenmayer, dated 18 October 1944: 'on completion of the said footmarch Eichmann intends to demand another 50,000 Jews with a view to achieving the ultimate aim, clearing Hungary of Jews.'[65] Since he sent children and elderly women who were of little use in digging anti-tank ditches on the marches, it can be accepted this was his aim.

Of nearly 40,000 men and boys, women and children rounded up and sent on a seven or eight days' march to Austria at least 7000 were shot or died along the route.[66] When news of this reached Switzerland and threatened to compromise Becher's sale of Jews for foreign currency, he complained to Himmler, who sent the chief of his Führungs Main Office and Rudolf Höss from the Concentration Camp Inspectorate to investigate. Both were appalled by the disorder and piled corpses they found along the road, and for a while the deportations were halted. Himmler soon sanctioned their resumption, it appears because the American organisation financing the

rescue of Jews via Switzerland was proving tardy in paying for the first small batch which had arrived. At all events Eichmann, according to the leader of the Budapest Jewish community, demanded a further 75,000 Jews for work in the Reich, threatening that unless the matter of payments was straightened out he would give orders 'to bump off every stinking Jew in Budapest'.[67]

According to Kersten, who learned of these transactions a few days after the resumption of deportation at the end of November, Himmler denied all knowledge when he tackled him. A few days later he admitted that money had been demanded; Schellenberg was dealing with the matter and would see that the money was handed to the International Red Cross.[68] For his part Schellenberg, in his memoirs, represented the whole scheme as a means of gaining touch with the western allies in order to negotiate a truce. Whatever the truth of the affair, Himmler's initial denial of responsibility when questioned by Kersten might suggest feelings of guilt or shame; yet to Kersten he had always expressed regret for the extermination policy while boasting to the Gauleiters and others he knew to be in sympathy with his rigorous execution of the hard task with which the Führer had entrusted him. He suited his approach to the person or group he was with; the 'true' Himmler varied according to the observer.

For Höss, who had occasion to observe the whole complex of concentration–extermination–armaments camps in the course of his visits of inspection during these closing months of 1944, everything in and of them 'arose solely and simply from the aspiration [*Wollen*] of the RFSS'. No SS-Führer would have dared to thwart or circumvent his intention, he wrote.[69] Eichmann too stressed this during his interrogation: 'I'd like to see the RFSS had he found out . . . that I disobeyed his orders. . . . I'd have been arrested then and there, on the spot.'[70] Höss concluded that 'the whole SS was the tool with which Heinrich Himmler, the RFSS, realised his intentions'; that he was overrun by a stronger force in 1944, 'namely the war', could not alter that *fact*.[71]

A survivor of the Polish camps named Reska Weiss wrote a book called *Journey through Hell* containing a vignette from this period at the end of 1944 which can be paralleled in countless testimonies: it is of a tent containing those too weak and ill to work or move, lying naked and frozen in their own urine and excrement, covered with lice and bites and festering sores, the stench and horror of which 'no stretch of imagination, no power of the written word can convey . . .'.[72] Another survivor, Alfred Oppenheimer, who had been reduced to a 'Mussulman' at Gleiwitz camp by this date, December 1944, testified that on the 25th he and some sixty others were picked out as unfit at rollcall and told they would be going 'to the chimney' in a few days. In the event they were saved by lack of trucks available to take them to Auschwitz.[73] Dr Dupont, who survived Buchenwald, described the effect of camp life as degradation. 'It was done systematically. An unrelenting will seemed to be at work to reduce those

men to the same level, the lowest possible level of human degradation.' The final stage in this process was setting prisoner against prisoner:

> Let me give a particularly brutal instance. In Kommando A.S.G. which was situated at Mansleben-am-See, 70 kilometres from Buchenwald . . . hangings took place in public in the hall of a factory connected with the salt mine. The SS were present at these hangings in full-dress uniform, wearing their decorations. The prisoners were forced to be present under threat of the most cruel beatings. When they hanged the poor wretches, the prisoners had to give the Hitler salute. Worse still, one prisoner was chosen to pull away the stool on which the victim stood. He could not evade the order as the consequences to himself would have been too grave. When the execution had been carried out the prisoners had to file off in front of the victim between two SS men. They were made to touch the body and, gruesome detail, look the dead man in the eyes. I believe that men who had been forced to go through such rites must inevitably lose the sense of their dignity as human beings.[74]

Another survivor of Buchenwald, Dr Alfred Balochowsky, was employed manufacturing typhus vaccines which, together with drugs supplied by German industry, notably IG Farben,[75] were used in a research programme on inmates. He described the method of obtaining twelve cultures of typhus germ designated BU (Buchenwald) 1–12 with which the experimental subjects were infected:

> A constant supply of these cultures was kept in Block 46 [the human experimental block] by means of the contamination of healthy individuals through sick ones; this was achieved by artificial inoculation of typhus germs by means of intravenous injections of 0.5 to 1 cubic centimetre of infected blood drawn from a patient at the height of the crisis. Now, it is well known that artificial inoculation of typhus by intravenous injection is invariably fatal. Therefore all these men who were used for bacterial culture during the whole time such cultures were required (. . . up to the liberation of the camp) died, and we counted 600 victims sacrificed for the sole purpose of supplying typhus germs. . . .[76]

To test drugs for use in the treatment of soldiers and civilians burned by allied incendiary bombs, Russian prisoners of war were taken to Block 46 and burned with phosphorous; Russians were chosen since 'they had the greatest physical resistance which was obviously superior to that of the French or other people of western Europe.' Balochowsky saw photographs, 'and it was not necessary to be a specialist to realise what these patients, whose flesh was burned to the bone, must have suffered.'[77] In another series of experiments homosexuals sent to Buchenwald by the courts were treated with sex hormones; another research programme was concerned with victims of starvation oedema, or swelling.

Balochowsky also spoke of the practice of skinning corpses, particularly those with tattoos:

> There were always tattooed human skins in Block 2. I cannot say whether there were many as they were continuously being received and passed on, but there were not only tattooed human skins, but also tanned human skins. . . . I saw SS men come out of Block 2, the Pathological Block, carrying tanned skins under their arms. I know from my comrades who worked in Block 2 that there were orders for skins; and these tanned skins were given as gifts to certain guards and to certain visitors who used them to bind books. . . .[78]

A survivor of Mauthausen, Maurice Lampe, recalled that the Chief Medical Officer of the camp had two human skulls on his desk as paperweights: 'These were the skulls of two young Dutch Jews who had been selected from a convoy of 800 because they had fine teeth.'[79]

Such was the empire of the camps: all who were sucked in, whether guards, doctors or inmates, were caught up inevitably in the living nightmare and adapted and lived the parts ascribed and expected of them or went insane or died or were killed, or themselves killed. It was outside imagination, a nether world where primal, forbidden urges for blood, sacrifice and subjection were licensed and given free rein on non-persons; it was the inversion of love, the ultimate fantasy of the superman and the master race where 'sub-humans' were reduced to 'Mussulmen' and 'Mussulmen' were despatched 'to the chimney' and reduced to ashes.

Something which struck Dr Dupont when asked to address himself to the question of responsibility was the similarity of regime in the different camps:

> The degree of uniformity in the way in which the camps were run is clear evidence of orders from higher quarters. In the case of Buchenwald in particular, the personnel, no matter how rough it might be, would not have done such things on their own initiative. Moreover the camp chief and the SS doctor himself always pleaded superior orders, often in a vague manner. The name most frequently invoked was that of Himmler. . . .[80]

Eicke, killed in the Russian campaign the previous year, had created and shaped the concentration camps, Höss wrote: 'However, the hard will of the RFSS was always behind him. What came from the concentration camps in war arose simply and solely from the aspiration of the RFSS.'[81] The tenor and content of Himmler's speeches from long before the war leave no doubt that camp Kommandants and guards were fulfilling his express wishes by dehumanising and treating the inmates as fit only for labour and death; he set the example himself by verbal humiliation of the prisoners drawn up for inspection during his visits to the camps.

There can be no doubt either about his attitude towards extermination of eastern Europeans to make room for Germanic man, nor of course about his determination to eliminate the Jews as a race from Europe: 'Anti-semitism is precisely the same as delousing,' he had told his Waffen-SS commanders in

April 1943, 'simply a matter of cleanliness. We are nearly deloused. . . .'[82] Nor can there be any doubt that his demands for the excavation of bomb-proof factories in caves and mines and increased production of V weapons, aircraft and armaments without regard to the conditions in which his troglodytes lived ushered in a climactic period of slavery, degradation and death in these final months of the war. The empire of the sub-humans was his; he had willed it and fashioned it from his vision of a pure Germanic future; he controlled it. Of all his achievements, this surely was his monument. Cold stone and wire remain on many of the sites as a reminder, and gruesome photographs and survivors' accounts are legion. Yet the extent of that realm he ruled is beyond human measure or recall.

It can scarcely be doubted that it reproduced the dark side of his own nature, impossible though to believe that it was his creation alone – that such dehumanisation of guards, doctors and inmates alike can be traced simply to the self-disgust of the Bavarian schoolboy who believed himself deficient in physical and martial values or Aryan appearance, or to the bullying of Professor Himmler, or the gym instructor, Herr Haggenmüller, or to the girls who rejected a prudish adolescent. He was a conformist. His beliefs were all around in the intellectual air he breathed. He had never found difficulty in recruiting lieutenants and functionaries who shared or learned to share them and most had very different and more successful childhoods and adolescence. There had never been any lack of rivals establishing camps in the early days; most had been simple torture chambers. His system had prevailed because it was the most orderly and efficient. When established there had been no lack of professors and medical doctors eager to take advantage of the facilities he offered, no lack of industrialists wishing to employ his slave labour. The list of factories established close by concentration camps reads like a rollcall of big business; IG Farben, Siemens, Krupp, Messerschmitt, Heinkel, Junkers, Saurer . . .

Albert Speer, the very image of rational, technological man, inspected the cave factories where emaciated, lice-ridden wretches worked on aircraft and V-rocket parts, inspected Mauthausen, smiled and shook the hand of the Kommandant, and his conscience was not touched.

Nor was discussion of extermination confined to Himmler or the SS; all the state secretaries and departmental chiefs who attended Heydrich's Wannsee conference in January 1942 were initiated into this highest, yet open state secret, as of course were all their ministers. Part of a record of a conversation between Goebbels and the Minister of Justice, Dr Thierack, in September 1942 ran:

> With regard to the destruction of asocial life, Dr Goebbels is of the opinion that the following should be exterminated: All Jews and gypsies, Poles having to serve three to four years' penal servitude, and Czechs and Germans sentenced to death, to penal servitude for life, or to security custody. The idea of exterminating them by work is the best. . . .[83]

HH – One could not have one without the other.

The Maestro – Our aim is to create any human so incapable of rising out of ~~his [illegible] the~~ his darkest rats that it would take all of humanity to slake his thirst for greater grasp of the whole.

The applause Himmler received from Gauleiters, Gruppenführers and Wehrmacht officers when he boasted to them of his accomplishment of the hard task with which he had been charged is proof of the level of support he enjoyed. And Höss's phrases about Eicke might be paraphrased: 'the hard will of the Führer was always behind him [Himmler]. What came from the concentration camps in war arose simply and solely from the aspiration of the Führer. . . .' The Führer, of course, expressed the will of the Party. Himmler's creation was the extreme realisation of that will.

The will had been born in frustration, humiliation and desire for vengeance, and as these emotions were heated again in the cauldron of defeat Himmler remained their supreme exponent. Along the borders of the Reich, east and west, labour gangs of prisoners of war, concentration camp inmates, Volkssturm units and others from the local populace, in several *Gaue* including women and children, dug anti-tank ditches and erected fortifications with insufficient materials, plant, transport, rations, water or even technical staff to plan and co-ordinate the lines.[84] 'The work was so strong and so hard and the way they treated us so bad,' one Norwegian internee from an under-Kommando of Neuengamme camp, near Hamburg, recalled, 'about half of the prisoners died of dysentery or ill treatment in the five or six weeks we were there. . . .'[85] Even the populace was sceptical: 'If the Atlantic Wall [coastal defences against the invasion] did not hold, how should these earth walls and ditches?' was one typical comment collected by Ohlendorf's public opinion researchers.[86]

In the cities devastated by air-raids other gangs of concentration camp inmates were employed searching for unexploded bombs, bodies and survivors among the debris. 'We were looking like dead persons, all of us looking very bad,' the same Norwegian recalled after being transferred to this dangerous work. He received no thanks from the pallid people contemplating the ruins of their homes: 'Some of them were hollering to us, "It is your fault that we are bombed."'[87] Perhaps the gang was mistaken for Jews. When 'terror flyers' were shot down and bailed out many were executed on the spot or handed over to the SD for 'special treatment'. In Hungary Eichmann strove to deport the last Jews within his grasp before the Red Army closed all communication to Budapest. Arrow Cross gangs rounded them up for him or herded them together for slaughter in scenes reminiscent of the first *wild* actions in Poland. In Slovakia the SS anti-partisan divisions liquidated the fugitive remains of the rebel army and the many young Jews who had joined to fight, and despatched civilians to labour camps.

Hate and destruction filled almost every corner of Himmler's world; it accorded with the message he had proclaimed since he was a young man; evidently it fulfilled him.

Since September Hitler had been planning a surprise Panzer attack through the Ardennes very similar to that with which he had opened

his lightning western campaign in 1940. The aim was to split the bulk of the US armies in the centre and south from the British forces in Belgium and Holland, drive through to Antwerp and so deprive the western allies of their major supply port. He believed that such a blow would gain time for the production and deployment of the V rockets, new U-boats and jet fighter aircraft, but above all 'deprive the enemy of his belief that victory is certain' – so he explained to the commanders who were to take part, so he must have explained to Himmler many times. 'Wars are finally decided by one side or the other recognising that they cannot be won.'

From outside the group delusion at Führer headquarters, it is plain that the operation, which Hitler designated with the deliberately misleading defensive codename 'Wacht am Rhein', had no chance of lasting success: acute fuel shortages, the overwhelming allied air superiority, ultimately the weight of armour the Red Army was massing to hurl against the eastern fronts he had weakened by drawing off troops for the west doomed the plan from the start. Hitler professed to disbelieve the intelligence appreciations of Russian strength and intentions, but at some level below the manic confidence he radiated probably he knew the Ardennes gamble could not be sustained militarily. Consequently he stressed the moral angle and predicted that 'a few more heavy blows' would cause the artificial enemy coalition to collapse. They had to show the enemy that 'whatever he does, he can never reckon on capitulation. Never! Never!'[88]

This was the message Himmler had been carrying to his Volksgrenadier divisions and the Volkssturm, and also to the enemy by means of Prützmann's secret Werwolf organisation. It is perhaps significant that in October Himmler had sent to Kaltenbrunner and Prützmann a London Reuter report of a speech by the British Foreign Secretary, Eden, concerning the demand for unconditional surrender, and it appears he marked one passage for special attention. Translated into English this ran: 'Himmler, the chief and responsible man of the Gestapo, is already making preparations for the continuation of resistance during the allied occupation of Germany. The purpose of this organisation is to lay the foundation for a secret organisation to operate over several years.'[89]

On the eve of the Ardennes gamble on which Hitler and the leading members of the regime, grasping at visions, placed all their hope, Himmler probably reached the height of favour and influence with his Führer. In November after the German Nineteenth Army in Alsace had been isolated in the heights of the Vosges by US and French thrusts to the Rhine, Hitler had confirmed him in the appointment Bormann claimed to have proposed, Supreme Commander Upper Rhine with jurisdiction extending from the Swiss frontier to the Saar. His primary task was to hold the Nineteenth Army bridgehead on the west bank of the Rhine without calling on the reserves Hitler was massing for the thrust into Belgium. He deployed Replacement Army divisions with hastily improvised Volksgrenadier, Volkssturm and anti-aircraft units, but in the event his capacity for command in the field was

scarcely tested. Eisenhower chose not to pinch out the Nineteenth Army pocket, instead turning the US Seventh Army northwards to concentrate with the Third Army against the Saar. Another mark of Hitler's favour was the choice of the Waffen-SS Panzer divisions, Leibstandarte, Das Reich, Hohenstaufen and Hitler Jugend, formed into the Sixth Panzer Army under SS-Oberstgruppenführer Sepp Dietrich – the first time an SS officer had commanded an army – to spearhead the main thrust to Antwerp. The Fifth Panzer Army formed of Wehrmacht divisions under General von Manteuffel was assigned the subsidiary target of Brussels.

It seems that Himmler shared Hitler's optimism about 'Wacht am Rhein'. He had moved with his headquarters train to the Black Forest railway line near Triberg at the beginning of December, and there he told Kersten that they would drive the British and Americans into the sea.[90] And Eichmann, visiting the new field headquarters at some time in early December, returned to Budapest apparently inspired with confidence about the outcome of the war. He told the leader of the Jewish community that Germany had passed the low point and was going to win. 'A new weapon is being produced, against which the allies will be powerless.'[91]

In darkness and mist before dawn on 16 December fourteen German infantry divisions moved off from the wooded slopes of the Eifel across a seventy-mile front towards five divisions of the US First Army holding this sector of the Ardennes. Behind them 10,000 assault guns opened on the US positions, and salvoes of V-1 rockets blasted off, targeted on Liège and Antwerp. The higher commanders believed the full aim of the assault unobtainable, but the morale of the troops was high, largely the result of the uncompromising message Goebbels and Himmler had been proclaiming since 20 July. The spirit is captured in a letter written by an Untersturmführer (junior lieutenant) of SS-Panzerdivision Hitler Jugend to his sister as he waited to jump off: 'Some believe in living but life is not everything! It is enough to know that we attack and will throw the enemy from our homeland. It is a holy task.'[92]

Five Panzer divisions started up behind the infantry. Aided by total surprise and thick weather which kept the allied aircraft grounded, sections of the American front were overwhelmed and considerable early gains made, particularly by von Manteuffel's Fifth Panzer Army. Only one SS Panzer unit made significant progress; this was the 1st Battle Group of the Leibstandarte, led by Obersturmbannführer Joachim Peiper, which penetrated nearly thirty miles. During this advance the twenty-nine-year-old Peiper and his subordinates lived up to the savage reputation the Waffen–SS had acquired in the east. A group of about 170 US prisoners who had laid down their arms near Malmédy were taken into a field beside the road on the line of advance and mown down by machine-gun fire from two half-tracks parked to face them. The single US officer who survived later testified: 'When they ceased firing after approximately five minutes, maybe three minutes, they came into the group to those men who were still alive,

and of course writhing in agony, and they shot them in the head. . . .'[93]

The investigation found that seventy-one of the Americans were massacred. It was far from the only SS atrocity in the campaign, or indeed in the west. The division Das Reich had earned a notorious reputation in anti-partisan operations in the mountains of Auvergne earlier in the year and had added to it in wake of the allied landings in June by burning the village of Oradour-sur-Glane and massacring the entire population in retaliation apparently for the death of an officer shot by a French sniper.

On 21 December Gottlob Berger wrote to Himmler urging him to curtail his activity as Supreme Commander Upper Rhine and return to Führer headquarters. His reason was not only the rumour-mongering from certain quarters – 'Reichsführer-SS is in disgrace, the Wehrmacht-tack' – but because he sensed that 'if the Reichsführer-SS is not at headquarters, our political work, the foundation of everything, suffers tremendously.'[94] Himmler had Brandt thank him for the hint and inform him that his command on the Rhine would not last long.[95]

He paid his customary attention to presents that Christmas for his families, his host of *Paten* or sponsored SS children, his Party colleagues and SS-Führers and families; the file cards for Wölffchen's boy, Thorisman, for instance, show that he received the mischievous clown of German *Volk*-tale, Tyll Eulenspiegel, chocolate and sweets – and for his ninth birthday three weeks later a fretsaw kit and chocolate.[96] Each member of his industrial Freundeskreis received two pounds of coffee and 100 cigarettes, and his generals and divisional commanders a thoughtful hamper containing a bottle of red and one of white wine, cognac, two pounds of coffee, a packet of tea, 100 cigarettes, chocolate, hare- and goose-liver pâté, toothpaste, shaving cream, soap, razor blades and a comb.[97] He took Berger's advice, travelling 150 miles north on Christmas Eve to the Führer headquarters used for the Ardennes offensive, Adlerhorst, or Eagle's Eyrie, by Bad Nauheim near Frankfurt, and inviting General Guderian to dine. As he expressed it in a letter afterwards, 'I spent the festive season at the front since in addition to my other activities I am for the moment commanding an Army Group on the Upper Rhine.'[98]

16

Fall from Grace

The Soviet winter offensive began before dawn on 12 January 1945 from a salient across the Vistula west of Sandomir between Lublin and Cracow on Marshal Koniev's 1st Ukrainian front in the General Gouvernement. Batteries of heavy and medium guns at a density of 300 to the kilometre unleashed a terrifying barrage along the German line; the storm lasted almost two hours, rocking the ground, hurling earth, concrete, guns, vehicles, men and pieces of men in the air, shaking the nerves of even the strongest survivors. Soviet punishment battalions advancing beneath the arch of noise took the front-line trenches. The armour followed. By evening advanced columns of heavy tanks had broken through to a depth of some twenty-five miles. Two days later Marshal Zhukov, commanding the 1st Belorussian front immediately north of Koniev's, launched equally stunning surprise attacks from two bridgeheads on the west of the Vistula south of Warsaw; by evening his tanks, too, ranged twenty miles behind the German lines. The German intelligence predictions were realised. These two Soviet Army Groups alone had five times the manpower and armour, seven times the artillery and seventeen times the air power of the forces in their path.[1] Immediately north of Zhukov, Marshal Rokossovskii, commanding the 2nd Belorussian front, opened an attack directed north-westerly for the Baltic coast. Hitler had not only refused to heed the intelligence assessments, he had refused permission to establish a main battle line [*Grosskampflinie*] several miles back from the front. Consequently Koniev's and Zhukov's tanks, slicing through headquarters and tactical reserves alike, were able to race on almost at will towards their first objectives on the way to the old Reich border and the Oder, bypassing Warsaw.

In the west, meanwhile, the Ardennes offensive had failed to do much more than drive a deep wedge into the US line. The weather, which had kept the allied air forces grounded, had restricted the German columns to twisting country roads which tended diagonally across the line of advance. Over Christmas the skies had cleared, releasing the allied aircraft, and the jams of tanks and supply vehicles clogging roads and crossings had provided concentrated, sitting targets. The bombers also strafed railways, roads, supply vehicles and depots in the rear, making it impossible to maintain the already insufficient supplies of fuel to the front. Despite renewed pleas by General Guderian, now Chief of the General Staff, to return to the

defensive and transfer the weight of forces east, it was not until 8 January that Hitler conceded defeat in his strategy, by then reduced to the aim of keeping the initiative in the west by attack, not until the 14th after Koniev and Zhukov had smashed through the thin defences along the Vistula that he was shocked into accepting Guderian's arguments. He left the Adlerhorst the following evening and established his headquarters at the Chancellery in Berlin on the morning of the 16th. Despite bomb damage to great parts of the building and craters in the garden, now softened under snow, his own rooms and study were unscathed.

He had aged immeasurably over the past year. The defeats and spectres of total disaster haunting him in the sleepless early mornings, the tense and unhealthy life he had been living without remission within close-guarded compounds which, as Speer realised in his own prison cell after the war, differed little from a prisoner's, above all the sustained blows to his self-image as the heaven-sent leader of the *Volk* had left their mark. His hair was grey, his moustache quite white, his face both puffy and drawn, the skin around the eyes giving an impression of total exhaustion; his gait was stooped, his movements so slow and dragging that they suggested premature senility and his left arm and hand shook embarrassingly.[2] Yet it is evident that he had lost none of his aura; his eyes retained a penetrating gleam 'creating a fearsome and wholly unnatural effect' according to one young officer who saw him for the first time, his lips their cruel downward compression. His will was harsh. Most surprisingly he retained and radiated unshakeable confidence. It was what his entourage demanded. They had selected themselves as his adherents happy to surrender everything, conscience, will, reasoning power, to his view of the world and his genius. Now in the all-surrounding gloom it was more than ever necessary to believe in him. His response was no doubt aided by amphetamines. It seems likely that after abandoning the habit briefly after 20 July and then after a bout of jaundice in late September he was taking them again both orally and intravenously.[3]

So group fantasy, which demanded a leader to bring hope, fed on the fantasy of the leader. The spiral is revealed at its most blatant in the relationship between Hitler and his young naval Commander-in-Chief, Grossadmiral Karl Dönitz. Dönitz's overt goal was to resume the offensive against the western powers with the new U-boats designated Types XXI and XXIII about to come into service. It seems evident, however, from his memoranda and the reports of his discussions with Hitler that underlying this ambition was the simple desire to prove himself to his Führer.[4]

For his part, Hitler used Dönitz's arguments to support his own strategy. The offensive power which the new U-boats would unleash in the spring became an article of faith, and with it Dönitz's insistence that the Baltic and particularly Danzig Bay were vital for U-boat training. It was evident to the General Staff that the armies holding East Prussia and Kurland beyond should be brought back to help build the defences before the

Oder, but Hitler would not hear of it. U-boats were more important than land operations, he said; they alone would be able to take the offensive to the western allies.[5]

Dönitz's optimism and the taut, professional manner in which he lent encouragement to outrageous expectation is a well-documented example of how the Führer system worked and continued working almost to the end, feeding on delusion. As always, fear buttressed the system. From 20 July the scarred features of Kaltenbrunner had generally been visible at situation conferences. For the soldiers, especially those like Guderian and von Rundstedt, Supreme Commander in the west, who had toyed with treason earlier, probably even for Keitel and Jodl, Kaltenbrunner could only have been a dread reminder of the disgrace and agony of their fellows, whose judgement seemed to be confirmed with every passing day. They could argue with Hitler about tactical dispositions, but the time for large action had passed. Neither Göring, completely discredited by the failures of the Luftwaffe, nor the new star at Court, Dönitz, would consider lending their services to rebellion. Neither would even support Guderian's strategic arguments, the one because of the weakness of his own position, the other because he was focused exclusively on U-boat training in the Baltic and proofs of his own loyalty and determination. Himmler, the one figure with the power to alter the system, was, in the wake of 20 July, far too dangerous to approach. He had in any case identified himself with the spirit of total war for the Führer.

On 17th January, Warsaw fell to Zhukov's forces; on the 19th Lodz fell, and Koniev's forces took Cracow; on the 20th the advanced formations of Koniev's Fifty-second Army crossed the German border east of Breslau and two days later spearheads of his Fourth Tank and Fifth Guards Armies reached the Oder north of Breslau and established a bridgehead on the western bank. Over some 350 miles between Koniev and Rokossovskii, pressing north-westerly for the Baltic near Danzig, the German forces were split, crushed, bypassed or encircled. Units in towns designated fortresses to be held at every cost dug into the icy ground; others made their way back in more or less confusion towards the Reich alongside Germans and *Volksdeutsche* only recently settled in the region by one or other of Himmler's agencies now fleeing in justified terror of the Red soldiers. Thousands more civilians were being evacuated by sea from the ports of West and East Prussia.

In this near catastrophe with the armies between the Vistula and Oder broken in every joint, Hitler called Field Marshal Schörner from Kurland to take over what remained of the Army Group in the central sector in Silesia, and Himmler from his Rhine command to build up and reform the remnants of the forces in the north as a new Army Group Weichsel or Vistula. Schörner was a dedicated Nazi with a ruthlessness that would have fitted him for the SS. It is evident from the methods both he and Himmler employed that they were appointed because they could be relied on

to stamp out what Hitler perceived as the defeatism and treachery behind the collapse. He rejected Guderian's renewed pleas to bring back Army Group North from Kurland, and took the equally perverse decision, in Guderian's eyes, of refusing to reinforce the Oder front with Sepp Dietrich's Sixth SS Panzer Army, then refitting after being pulled out of the Ardennes on 8 January; he had earmarked this 'fire brigade' for Hungary.

Already, before the Soviet offensive from the Vistula, he had sent two elite SS Panzer divisions, Totenkopf and Wiking, from the central front to Hungary to relieve German forces trapped in and around Budapest by two Russian army groups. Since then the Russians had succeeded in clearing the eastern half of the city, Pest, in savage street fighting. The SS Panzerkorps fought its way almost to the suburbs of Buda on the other bank of the Danube still in German possession, but Hitler was determined that the city should be held, consequently no break-out was attempted. Such was the position as he reaffirmed his intention to send the Sixth SS Panzer Army to Hungary. As he explained it at the situation conference on the afternoon of 23 January, the Hungarian oil fields and the Vienna basin were vital since they produced 80 per cent of Germany's oil; without them it would be impossible to continue the war.[6] However, the directive he had sent von Rundstedt three days before to prepare for the immediate transfer of the SS Panzer Army to the east explained the move as not allowing the enemy to call the tune everywhere. He had decided on 'halting the Russians and going over to the offensive'.[7]

Hitler retained enormous faith in the Waffen-SS and may really have expected the Sixth Panzer Army to turn the tide in the south-east; he had always staked much on surprising the enemy. His dispositions may even have been designed for the long term – after the anticipated crack in the enemy coalition when the Anglo-Americans had rallied to his side against Stalin. Already on the 19th he had authorised von Ribbentrop to put out peace feelers to the west via Allen Dulles.[8] It is also possible that he was suffering from amphetamine toxicity and displaying the typical signs of elation with consequent impaired judgement.

'Do you think the English can be really enthusiastic about all the Russian developments?' he asked Göring and Jodl after the situation conference on the 27th, by which time both Zhukov's and Koniev's armies were massed along and in places across the Oder; one bridgehead was less than fifty miles from Berlin. Göring provided the standard answer which he knew Hitler wished to hear, and which he must have heard himself from Hitler's mouth so often: the British had not expected them to hold off the western allies like madmen while the Russians drove deeper and deeper into the country. 'They entered the war to prevent us going into the east, not to have the east come to the Atlantic.' Göring concluded that if the Russian successes continued they could expect a wire – from Churchill – within a few days.[9]

Himmler, who probably had more direct knowledge of western thinking

than most through his intelligence services, buoyed himself up on the same hope. It is notable, however, that he had taken no part in the strategic planning which had brought the present situation about. He remained content, as he had always been, for Hitler to dictate grand strategy; he simply carried out the functions assigned to him, and echoed the Führer line. According to Guderian, Himmler was as dismissive as Hitler when he had tried to warn him before Christmas of the Russian build-up and the weakness of the eastern front.[10]

The German people who had to stand in the breach while the miracle matured were more realistic. Ohlendorf's public opinion reports appear to have ceased by this time, but a wired request from SS-Haupsturmführer Rolf d'Alquen, serving in the so-called 'Propaganda' unit of Himmler's former Army Group Upper Rhine, to his brother, who was chief of the SS-Propaganda Regiment in Berlin and chief editor of the SS paper *Das Schwarzen Korps*, provides a telling vignette. It was dated 20 January:[11]

> The mood in the fighting troops due to the events on the east front becomes more nervous and serious by the day. . . . Should the situation deteriorate further in the next few days it is to be expected that the troops will no longer be able to bear the anxiety and their fighting spirit will be paralysed. . . .
>
> The mood in the local populace is, apart from the unthinking, similar. . . . In this grave situation I feel myself duty-bound to make the urgent request to the commander to attempt to come up with a word of deliverance for us . . . from Führer headquarters. Perhaps it would be possible as a start to find out from circles close to the Führer whether the Führer has answered the question for his closest entourage 'What is to happen now?', and perhaps he can be stirred to say this openly either in person or through the mouth of his representative. . . .

D'Alquen went on to say that all thinking people in the Army and the population were convinced that a decisive change in the war was no longer possible with conventional means. He suggested that a statement be put out that the front had to be held for a short time, then a weapon would be deployed which would bring the decisive turn in their fortunes. He felt it his duty, D'Alquen concluded, to ask that at least the Führer be made aware of this mood of the front.

It is extremely unlikely that Bormann would have allowed such a message to reach Hitler; Ohlendorf's reports had been judged too strong for a long time. However, Gunter d'Alquen believed it important and, as he wrote, 'typical' enough of the 'psychological condition of the troops' to send it to Dr Brandt at Himmler's new field headquarters at Deutsch Krone in Pomerania to the north of the Soviet breakthrough: he asked him to bring it to Himmler's attention.[12] Himmler replied on 30 January with a letter to be forwarded to Rolf d'Alquen:[13]

> . . . I know the troops have severe anxieties, but I have the impression that you yourself are the most oppressed. I consider your proposal absolutely impossible.

> The troops must be told that, bitter as it is, they must do their duty now more than ever, and only if the west is guarded now will the German forces in the east be in the position first to parry the thrusts and then to become active again.
>
> From you yourself I expect also the inner bearing of an SS man. I hope you are aware that one is only at the end if one is beaten in the heart.

A week later he wrote to Heydrich's widow Lina in reply to a letter of hers. He described his task in Pomerania as very difficult, but he had the 'firm conviction' that they would first hold the Russian advance, then throw it back and regain the lost territory: 'as improbable as it might appear at present, during the course of this year, which represents a *fortissimo* of the war, this struggle will end victoriously for us because we cannot be defeated. . . .'[14]

And on 12 February he wrote to an Obergruppenführer Schlessmann consenting to his petition that a certain Fräulein have her baby in a Lebensborn home. 'The situation here was very difficult,' he concluded in reference to his command 'but I have the firm conviction we will master it.'[15]

Guderian and other Army officers have left scathing descriptions of Himmler's command of Army Group Vistula. No doubt their strictures can be accepted: he had no experience of leading troops in the field; he was inclined to immerse himself in sudden enthusiasm and details, and had grown accustomed to issuing orders from his desk to be carried out virtually regardless of the situation or resources on the spot. Nevertheless it was customary after the war, especially for officers of the regular services, to depict Himmler in the most grotesque light and invest him with every shortcoming. This was both a psychological and political necessity. By saddling him with the odium of crime, and in large measure the responsibility for disaster, they presented their own service as honourable, disguised their complicity and provided a scapegoat for the most terrible moral and material defeat suffered by the nation. There was no reason, in any case, for regular Army officers to be sympathetic towards the SS.

In the very short term Himmler's methods were effective. His energy and commitment, above all his capacity – indeed his taste – for absolute ruthlessness succeeded in halting the rout at the Oder. He improvised divisions from the remnants of the beaten armies, naval and Luftwaffe units, anti-aircraft batteries, frontier guards, youths and ageing men of the Volkssturm, and imbued them with his spirit of fanatical determination to beat back the invader. Commanders were instructed to hold positions regardless and, if they felt themselves unable to do so, to hand over to another who had the will. Geheime Feldpolizei and Ordnungspolizei units received instructions to shoot deserters out of hand or to hang them summarily as examples. Many of his divisional commanders and two Korps commanders, the former Police generals, von dem Bach-Zelewski

and Reinefarth, had established their reputation in anti-partisan warfare where atrocity was the rule. So too his Chief of Staff, SS-Brigadeführer Heinz Lammerding, who had served as Chief of Staff to Eicke in the Totenkopf division and subsequently to von dem Bach before being appointed to command Das Reich, in which capacity he had brought the horrors of the east to France, most notoriously to the village of Oradour-sur-Glane.

With such executives, it is not surprising that when Goebbels' Press Officer, Wilfred von Oven, visited the Oder front in mid-February his first vivid impression was of bodies of deserters hanging from the girders of broken bridges.[16] The following month Goebbels visited Schörner's Army Group in Silesia and found the same sanction in use: 'professional stragglers', as Schörner described them to him, were hanged on the nearest tree with a placard around their necks: 'I am a deserter and have declined to defend German women and children.'[17]

Inspired on the one hand by passion to defend homeland and womenfolk against the Red Army, whose soldiery were avenging SS atrocities in Russia with rape and barbaric cruelties, terrorised on the other hand by the treatment meted out to deserters by their own police, the scratch formations of Army Group Vistula contested every position savagely and bled the Russian forces as Himmler had promised,[18] They were aided by a sudden thaw which hampered operations across the Oder and the movement of tanks and supplies up the over-extended Russian lines. Yet in view of the crushing enemy superiority, it could only be a temporary reprieve. It was Himmler's failure to represent this forcefully to Hitler or to support Guderian's arguments for releasing the armies dissipated along the Baltic coast to concentrate them in defence of the Reich that justifies the scorn of the military. Guderian represented him as terrified of Hitler's rages; Kersten and Schellenberg, too, referred to his constant fear of Hitler. It is evident from what Himmler told his other close confidant, Professor Gebhardt, that he realised Hitler was making strange decisions. Despite it he was unable to break free from the Führer's dominance, unable to break the habit of obedience which he could justify as loyalty.

It is easy to criticise from the outside and despise the moral cowardice which prevented him standing up to Hitler, rather burying his head in the group rationalisations for continuing the war at the expense of his men and the German people as a whole. Viewed from his own world, it is difficult to see what else he could have done. It was not only Hitler who was determined never to give in; every member of the leading circle expressed the same bitter spirit of defiance. In early February Roosevelt, Churchill and their military staffs met Stalin and his military chiefs at Yalta in the Crimea. The joint communiqué issued on the 13th reiterated the allies' resolution after victory to divide Germany between them. It appeared finally to remove the hope of a split in the enemy camp, at the same time giving powerful reinforcement to the will to fight on. Hitler greeted the communiqué with a cry of triumph;

it confirmed his views on the uselessness of negotiating from weakness – although he had authorised von Ribbentrop to try. 'If we lose the war, Germany will cease to exist!' he exclaimed. 'What matters now is to keep our nerve and not give in.'[19] Goebbels had no difficulty in using the terms of the communiqué to spread this mood to the people.

From a practical point of view also Himmler had no choice but to follow his Führer. The western allies had not only refused to do business with him, they had branded him as the leading war criminal after Hitler and had vowed to hunt down all war criminals and bring them to justice. On the simple level of survival he had no interest in surrender. Schellenberg, Kersten and no doubt Ohlendorf, speaking for the banking and industrial Freundeskreis, were still urging him to make large concessions to the west by releasing Jews and concentration camp inmates in order to open negotiations to end the war. Since Hitler would not countenance this, Schellenberg wanted him to remove Hitler and take power, otherwise 'one day history would hold him responsible for his lack of decision' – that at least was Schellenberg's post-war account.[20] Yet to take power without bringing on a civil war Himmler would have needed the support of Dönitz, Göring and above all the Party, represented by Martin Bormann, but even to have broached the subject in that quarter must have been fatal. Already his long absences from Court were providing opportunities for his rivals – especially Bormann and it seems Kaltenbrunner as well now – to undermine his position. It is probable that his fear of Hitler, which most close observers noted at this period, was an indication of doubt and confusion underlying his public optimism. On the one hand Kersten and Schellenberg were engaged – as Schellenberg put it – in an almost daily struggle for his soul,[21] on the other hand there was the hate-filled, destructive atmosphere at the Chancellery, his fear of Hitler's rages, his suspicion of what his rivals were plotting behind his back.

He of course was feared by them. He was the most feared man in the Reich with the most feared organisation behind him.

By mid-February 1944, Himmler had been forced by further Russian advances to move his command post to Birkenhain, near Prenzlau, some thirty miles west of the Oder, fifty miles north of Berlin. A large mansion purchased for the SS before the war, now extended with the usual timber barracks, served as Army Group headquarters. A personal headquarters train, called 'Steiermark', stood on a nearby siding in birch woods. The cover name was 'Birkenwald'.

Order No. 1 for installations 'Birkenwald'

1. Like all field headquarter sites Birkenwald is to be kept secret. Any disclosure of its position, use etc. will be punished as high treason.

2. It is to be kept unconditionally secret when the RFSS is in residence . . .[22]

He confessed to Goebbels early in March that his reason told him they had little hope now of winning the war but, he added, his instinct led him to believe that a political opening would emerge sooner or later.[23] Of course he had to say that; he knew it would get straight back to Hitler and Bormann.

He was still seeking that political opening himself. His negotiations with the American Jewish organisations via the Red Cross in Switzerland had more or less foundered because Kaltenbrunner had brought them to Hitler's attention, but a new hope had emerged from Sweden. This was Count Folke Bernadotte, whose uncle was chief of the Swedish Red Cross. Bernadotte arrived in Berlin on 17 February, ostensibly on behalf of a Swedish Red Cross team seeking to repatriate Swedish-born women who had married Germans but since lost touch with them. His real purpose was to bargain with Himmler for the release of prisoners (especially Scandinavian) from the concentration camps.[24] He had no authority to speak on behalf of the allies but he hoped to play on Himmler's desire to establish a relationship with the west. Himmler took care to cover himself by ensuring that Bernadotte saw Kaltenbrunner and von Ribbentrop first, then on 19 February received him at Professor Gebhardt's hospital at Hohenlychen conveniently close to his field headquarters, Birkenwald. He wore field-grey uniform without decorations, and hornrimmed spectacles; Bernadotte's first impression, like that of everyone else who met him, was of 'quite an unimportant official, whom one would hardly have noticed if one had met him in the street'. Nevertheless it is evident from Bernadotte's further description that, whatever his inner doubts, Himmler was well able to maintain his public front:

> He seemed strikingly and amazingly obliging. He displayed traces of humour with a hint of grimness, which he used to relieve the tension. Least of all was there anything diabolical in his appearance. Of the cold hardness in his face, of which I heard so much, I saw none. In his talk with me he showed himself to be a very lively individual – quite sentimental in his attitude towards the Führer – and he showed that he was full of enthusiasm as well. It was a highly remarkable experience to listen to the man who had employed the most scandalous means to send millions of people to their death, talking with rapture about the gentlemanly methods of warfare between the Germans and British in France in the summer of 1944, when action was interrupted in the middle so that both sides could collect their wounded. . . .[25]

When Bernadotte asked whether it was not pointless to continue the struggle, Himmler replied that every German would fight like a lion before surrendering. As for his attitude towards Hitler, he used almost exactly the words he had used in arguments with Kersten: as a soldier and a German, he could not go back on his oath. Moreover he owed everything he was to Hitler: 'How can I betray him? I have built the SS on the basis of loyalty. I cannot now abandon that basic principle.'

He said he would not release Scandinavian prisoners without 'compensation', and suggested an undertaking by the Danish and Norwegian underground that they would stop further sabotage. Of course Bernadotte could not agree to this and eventually they reached the compromise that Scandinavian prisoners could be transferred to a single camp where they would be looked after by the Red Cross. The movements would be carried out by a convoy of Red Cross vehicles supplied by Sweden.

Bernadotte, evidently tipped off by Schellenberg, presented him with a work on Swedish rune-stones at the end of the meeting, and could see that he was moved by the present. He came away with the impression that the Reichsführer was one of the most complicated people he had ever met.

Afterwards Himmler charged Schellenberg with seeing that the agreement was carried out despite the difficulties to be expected from Kaltenbrunner and probably von Ribbentrop as well. Schellenberg begged him, according to his own account, to return to Berlin and arrange for peace in the west. Since capitulation could not even be mentioned in Führer headquarters he probably advocated an SS putsch to remove the entire Führer circle before it was too late. Whatever the arguments in what he described as a 'stormy conversation' it seems evident that Himmler, who had formed a favourable impression of Bernadotte, was anxious to keep open this possible line of contact with the west, and may well have authorised Schellenberg to negotiate peace terms which Bernadotte could carry to Eisenhower. Schellenberg stated in his memoirs that Himmler did so, but next day revoked everything.[26]

The talk at Hohenlychen coincided with the end of a thrust by Himmler's Third Panzer Army against Zhukov's right flank. Himmler had been against the attack until more fuel and ammunition could be brought up but Guderian had forced the plan through during an angry meeting with Hitler in the Chancellery. Himmler had had to look on in silence, as Hitler raged and screamed; he finally suffered the indignity of having an officer from Guderian's staff, General Walther Wenck, attached to Army Group Vistula to command the operation.[27] Now, after a promising start, the attack had petered out. As Bormann wrote to his wife, 'Uncle Heinrich's offensive did not succeed. . . .'[28]

The Soviet High Command had been concerned for some time about the gap Guderian had tried to exploit between Zhukov's right and Rokossovskii's left flank in Pomerania, and now sent orders to both marshals for a linked attack north for the Baltic coast at Kolberg. Rokossovskii launched his assault on the morning of 24 February; Zhukov followed on 1 March, achieving complete tactical surprise, for Himmler and the Army staff had expected him to begin the drive for Berlin and had disposed the reserves accordingly. The Soviet tanks sliced through the German defences, forcing another pell-mell retreat of soldiers and civilian refugees alike, and reached Kolberg on the 4th, trapping large forces between the two pincers.[29]

That evening Goebbels found a dismal mood at the Chancellery: 'The generals hang their heads and the Führer alone holds his head high.'[30] Even Hitler was somewhat depressed though, in contrast to the mood in which Goebbels had found him at the beginning of the week, and the shake in his left hand had increased greatly. He launched into a criticism of the General Staff for deploying their forces before Berlin. He (Hitler) had always expected the Soviets to move on Pomerania first, but he had allowed the staff to have their way. Himmler, he complained, had also taken the view that the offensive would be aimed at Berlin.[31]

Himmler, whether broken by the strain of commanding an army group – as his military enemies asserted – worn out by the unending work of the several posts he was filling, and no doubt aware that his star had waned with the Führer, or simply facing reality after his earlier hopes of driving the Russians back, had retired to bed at Hohenlychen. According to Goebbels, who visited him there on 7 March, he had suffered a severe attack of angina, but was recovering. He was unlikely to have been frank about his health with Goebbels. According to his personal secretary, Brandt, he had had too much to do and had tried to keep doing it despite a protracted bout of flu.[32] The explanation may be that he was suffering the crippling headaches and stomach cramps that afflicted him at times of crisis and decision. Kersten described him as in a highly nervous state. According to his account this was because of an order Himmler had received from Hitler to destroy the concentration camps and their inmates rather than allow them to fall into enemy hands.[33]

Kersten had just returned from Stockholm, where he had agreed to negotiate on behalf of the World Jewish Congress for supplying food and medicines to the concentration camps and releasing Jews to Sweden and Switzerland. At first, however, he could not even talk Himmler out of the senseless slaughter decreed in the Führer order: if National Socialist Germany were to be destroyed, Himmler said, their enemies and the criminals now sitting in the concentration camps were not going to be permitted the triumph of emerging as victors. 'They will go under with us! That is the clear and logical order of the Führer, and I will see that it is carried out thoroughly and meticulously.'[34] Kersten persisted, but it took him a week to work Himmler round to the point at which he agreed not to pass on Hitler's order to destroy the camps on the enemy's approach, instead to have them handed over in an orderly manner. Kersten felt sure that Himmler would have been prepared to make much wider concessions had he not been in constant fear of Hitler and his circle, especially Goebbels and Bormann. Despite this over the next days he did manage to wring from him the release of batches of Jews and other prisoners from different camps.[35]

For any analysis of Himmler's character, March was the testing month. The war was lost irrecoverably. In the area of his own command, roads were filled with beaten troops and civilians fleeing west; Zhukov's tanks pressed through when they came upon them, mowing the ragged columns down

indiscriminately with gunfire, grinding stragglers into the mire beneath their tracks. In Silesia it was the same. Visiting the front there, Goebbels found frightful evidence of Soviet atrocity visible everywhere along the road. In return he found German troops were beating Soviet prisoners to death with shovels or rifle butts. [36] He found it necessary to tone down the 'indescribable' tales of Red Army rape and savagery in his propaganda lest he terrify the population. In Hungary where the Buda side of the capital had finally fallen to the Red Army in mid-February, accompanied by a similar orgy of rape and insensate slaughter, Sepp Dietrich's counter-offensive with the Sixth SS Panzer Army ground to a halt for want of fuel. By 15 March, with his tanks and assault guns stationary targets, he began an attempt to save what he could; his withdrawal soon turned into rout.

In the west, spearheads of the US First Army had crossed the Rhine at Remagen in the Eifel on 7 March over a bridge whose main charges failed to detonate. Another bridgehead on the eastern bank of the Rhine was established further south by the US Third Army in the night of 22 March, and on the 23rd Anglo-American forces under Montgomery made a major crossing of the lower Rhine south of the Dutch frontier at Wesel. By the 26th twelve bridges had been constructed here to feed the advance, and the way was open to the Ruhr and the Westphalian Plain.

Meanwhile in the skies over the Reich waves of enemy bombers continued to range freely by day and night. Berlin and the industrial cities were being converted into wastelands of rubble and gutted buildings whose numbed survivors, deprived of sleep, lived as best they could in the cellars beneath, like 'wanderers who have discovered a ruined city in a desert', Stephen Spender thought when visiting what had been Cologne immediately after the war, 'camping there, living in the cellars and hunting amongst the ruins for the booty, relics of a dead civilisation'.[37] Firestorms created in residential districts killed thousands; water and electricity supplies were dislocated; transport came to a standstill. Already rations had been reduced to subsistence level. Perhaps worst of all it was plain that the leadership had no answer either to the air terror or to the invasions on several fronts.

'The morale of the German people, both at home and at the front, is sinking ever lower,' Goebbels entered in his diary for 12 March, and he noted that criticism did not now stop short even of the Führer himself.[38]

The following week an SD report on the mood of the workers in Mecklenburg suggested a weary cynicism directed against the leaders and officialdom:[39] and further reports from other areas on 28 March depicted a populace totally alienated from the Party and disbelieving everything it was told, especially it seems announcements in the name of the Führer. 'Do they believe the German *Volk* has completely given up thinking?' was one comment reported from Baden. 'Do they believe they can still jolly the German *Volk* along with phrases and empty promises?' Another comment from Baden suggested that they should not always be told they would inevitably win the war; it should be made clear how their enemies

could still lose it. Everywhere refugees had spread stories of chaos during evacuations caused by the failure of responsible leaders and officials. From Hamburg it was reported that Party officers in the street in uniform were made aware of the animosity of the people towards them. Comments recorded at Lüneburg about a Führer proclamation included: 'The Führer is prophesying again!' and 'It is always the old record.'[40]

Apprehension of defeat and worse lurked behind the eyes of women and between the phrases of Party and SS leaders who could not mention it by name. The knowledge was latent at Führer conferences, personified in the racked figure of the Führer himself, now driven by the air assault on Berlin to live in the complex of concrete bunkers beneath the Chancellery, listening to reports of disaster, lack of fuel, lack of reserves, clasping his right hand over his left to try and still the shaking that transmitted to his whole frame. At times he still compared his situation with that of Frederick the Great before the miracle which turned the Seven Years War; he would stare into the stern blue eyes looking out from his portrait of the great man behind his desk, drawing strength from his will. More often he blamed Göring, von Ribbentrop, the generals – he should have purged them instead of Röhm and the SA in 1934 – ministers, the professionals and intellectuals of the old school, and now Himmler for letting him down. He laid the blame for the rout in Pomerania directly on Himmler. In the course of a diatribe against him on 11 March, he told Goebbels that Himmler had fallen prey to the Army General Staff from the beginning of his command. Goebbels entered in his diary: 'The Führer accuses him [Himmler] of flat disobedience and intends to give him a piece of his mind on the next available occasion and make clear that in the event of a repetition of such an instance an irreparable breach would occur between him and Himmler. . . .'[41]

The opportunity occurred when Himmler came to Berlin on the afternoon of the 15th. The day before Brandt had described him as having recovered from the illness which had kept him to his bed: 'Happily he is now almost back to his old self again.'[42] What he was like after his interview in the Chancellery bunker is not recorded nor what Hitler said to him, but in the evening Hitler told Goebbels in a telephone conversation that he had given him 'an extraordinarily severe dressing-down'.[43]

The grotesquely swollen ego that made Hitler lay the blame for catastrophe on everyone but himself provoked the desire, since he had to fall, to bring everything down with him. Lust for the destruction of his enemies, the driving force of his years in power and of the war itself, turned on the German *Volk* who had proved biologically inferior, and failed him. 'The rabble aren't going to have the chance to cover up their cowardice by a so-called revolution this time,' he had told Albert Speer as early as the previous November. 'I guarantee that! No city will be left in the enemy's hands until it is a heap of ruins.'[44] Speer, the friend with whom he had shared his passion for architecture, his monumental building plans for the thousand-year Reich, his devotion to the cause of his *Volk*, had seen the

masks drop away to reveal 'nothing but iciness and misanthropy'.[45] Now Hitler was planning to extend the scorched-earth policy in the east to the Reich itself, ostensibly to deny the invaders means of sustaining their assault on the homeland, emotionally to vent his hate and to repay the ultimate insult to the world of his creation in blood and ashes.

Of the top leadership, only Speer was able to remove himself and look into the vortex from the outside. After returning from an inspection tour of the Rhineland industries in mid-March convinced that the war was lost economically, he set about writing a memorandum – on the day Himmler received his dressing-down – to dissuade Hitler from his policy of destruction. His responsibilities brought him into close contact with the industrialists and financiers who had known for a long time that the war was lost, and who were trying to plan for after the war; no doubt Speer was acting for them in part. No doubt he was also starting to work his own post-war passage from the ruins. It required great moral and physical courage, nevertheless, to tell Hitler the war was lost. In four to eight weeks, he wrote, the final collapse of the German economy was to be expected with certainty. After that the war could not even be sustained militarily. To destroy Germany's remaining resources could not, therefore, affect the outcome; it could only deprive the German people of their means of further existence. 'We have no right at this stage to carry out demolitions which might affect the life of the nation.'[46]

Hitler disregarded his plea. On 19 March he issued a decree to Gauleiters, instructing them on the approach of the enemy to destroy everything in their path, all factories and utilities, power stations, water- and gas-works, dams, all transport and communications facilities and rolling stock, fuel depots and food and clothing supplies of all kinds. When Speer remonstrated, he told him that if the war were lost the nation also would perish. That was inevitable. There was no need to consider the basis for even a primitive existence – on the contrary it was better to destroy it themselves.

'The nation has proved itself weak,' he went on – there is no reason to doubt Speer's recollection since it was the basis of the *Weltanschauung* and he said the same thing many times – 'and the future belongs solely to the stronger eastern nation. Besides, those who will remain after the battle are the inferior; for the good will have fallen.'[47]

Speer somehow survived his protest and continued to survive despite dedicating himself to sabotaging the decree wherever and whenever he could. This is the more remarkable since Hitler had established itinerant courts martial to try and summarily execute military commanders who disobeyed orders, failed in their duty or uttered 'defeatist' remarks. The first victims had already been shot.

However Speer escaped, he demonstrated that it was possible for one of the inner circle to break free and actively to rebel. Himmler could never make the break. His roots in the ideology went deeper than Speer's; he was also a politician of subtlety and was still attempting to sell the west the view

he had developed of the SS as the instrument of anti-Bolshevik order in an Anglo-American–German western Europe. He had to conceal his attempts at negotiation both from the paranoid group in the Führer bunker and from his own senior officers, who looked to him for the strong lead he had always given. For this was, of course, the very situation for which the Schutzstaffel had been created. They were the Führer's praetorian guard, the final bulwark when all others proved weak to preserve the National Socialist state and prevent its subversion from within.

Torn by irreconcilable conflicts between loyalty and rationality, myth and insupportable reality, between fear of the Führer bunker and fear of humiliation and execution as a war criminal at the hands of the allies, Himmler manoeuvred cautiously, acting the different parts required of him by different groups, picking the brains of von Dohnanyi, Albrecht Haushofer and other prisoners of 20 July, twisting but never making a decided alteration of course one way or the other to stake all on the outcome, hoping somehow to glimpse a way past the rocks and the six-headed monster. This seems to be the explanation of his behaviour from March to the end, and it seems to delineate his character. Whether he renounced National Socialism emotionally, whether he returned to God as he told the Finance Minister, von Krosigk, later, whatever inner turmoil and tearing he experienced were concealed behind his vacillations and his actor's masks. Goebbels wrote of him on 7 March as 'one of our strongest personalities'.[48] Guderian, who had opportunity to study him closely during these last months, described him as 'the most impenetrable of Hitler's disciples'.[49]

On 17 March, two days after Himmler received the dressing-down from Hitler in Berlin, Kersten broached the idea that he (Himmler) should meet representatives of the World Jewish Congress. Himmler was horrified: the Führer would have him shot on the spot.[50] Kersten pointed out that as chief of the frontier service he could keep the entry of the Jews secret and Hitler, Bormann and Goebbels need never hear of it. At length Himmler agreed that Kersten should arrange a meeting at his own country property, Hartzwalde. On the eve of Kersten's departure for Stockholm on this errand, he sent him a personal letter to say he was convinced that, 'notwithstanding the bloody wounds inflicted on all sides, wisdom and reason must prevail, and with these the humane heart and willingness to help.'[51]

By this date, 21 March, Guderian had persuaded Himmler that for the sake of his health, obviously worn down by overwork in his many posts, he should at least give up command of Army Group Vistula. According to his account Himmler, still lurking at Hohenlychen although suffering only from a head cold, did not take the idea amiss; but he could not, he said, suggest it to the Führer. Guderian offered to put it to Hitler for him and he agreed. Three days later Goebbels heard that Himmler wished to give

What was the use of being a politician if you couldn't say anything and everything when it was expedient to do so, but with this letter, he abused the privilege.

up his command; he thought it a good idea. After all, he entered in his diary, Himmler's task had merely been to plug the hole in the defences. Unfortunately he had been diverted by a quest for military glory – an indication of the gossip in the Führer circle – and had failed completely. If he continued it could only 'tarnish his good political reputation'.[52]

General Gotthard Heinrici was appointed to relieve him in command of Army Group Vistula. He arrived at the Birkenhain headquarters on 22 March. Himmler greeted him standing by his desk, behind which hung a portrait of Frederick the Great. When both were seated, the staff officers laying out maps and a stenographer ready to take down his words, Himmler launched into an interminable report of his stewardship of the front which convinced Heinrici that 'in four months he had failed to grasp the most basic elements of good generalship.'[53] However that may be, at length, after the staff officers had left, Himmler ushered Heinrici to a settee on the far side of the room out of earshot of the stenographer and confided in a low voice that he had taken steps to negotiate peace with the west through a neutral country. There are several possible explanations for this revelation: he may have been seeking to bolster his ego before this taut, serious, greying old military man who was taking over a task in which he realised he had failed conspicuously; or, knowing that the military situation was desperate, he may have been bolstering Heinrici's determination to continue fierce resistance with the hope of a favourable turn of events. It is even possible that the confidence was a move to establish rapport in case he should need him on his side in an SS putsch against Hitler and the Party. Heinrici wondered if it were a devilish provocation to test his loyalty, so he recalled later.[54] Yet he knew the war was lost as surely as any other general. Guderian, who had briefed him on his new post, had tried to persuade Himmler to insist on a discussion with the Führer about surrender terms only the previous afternoon. But 'there was nothing to be done with this man. He was afraid of Hitler.'[55]

Himmler may have mentioned the negotiations to Heinrici because he felt close to success, indeed this may even explain why he was prepared to give up command of the Army Group. The talks he referred to had been opened by Karl Wolff in February using an Italian businessman, Baron Luigi Parrilli, concerned about Hitler's scorched-earth policy in northern Italy, and assisted by officers of the Swiss secret service. With these go-betweens Wolff had secured a secret meeting with Allen Dulles in an OSS safe house in Zurich. It had been made plain to him before the meeting that the allies would not deal with Hitler or Himmler, and he had sworn several times that he came entirely on his own initiative without their knowledge. It was then that he learned for the first time from his Swiss interlocutor of Himmler's systematic murder of millions of Jews in the east. It was a story Dulles had to pretend to believe; Wolff continued to tell the same story to the end of his long life in 1984. As always he made a good military impression and apparently convinced Dulles and his émigré

expert on German affairs, Gero von Schulz-Gaevernitz, that he had parted company from his Nazi masters. Dulles had to believe this too, for Roosevelt was looking for an armistice in Italy to release US forces.

The circumstantial evidence is against Wolff's story. He had been in Germany on 6 February, immediately prior to flying back to Italy and opening the drive for negotiations with Dulles,[56] and had spent the best part of the day with Himmler, whose appointments calendar read: '13.45 SS-Obergruf. Wolff; 14.00 Meal with Wolff, Oberg, Seyss-Inquart. . . . 15.00 SS-Obergruf. Wolff.'[57] The same day Wolff and von Ribbentrop had an audience together with Hitler in the Chancellery and received permission to explore contacts with the west. Himmler knew that he and Hitler were unacceptable to the west; it must be assumed that Wolff's brief was to deny his attachment to the regime – for reasons which will appear. In any case, at the end of his meeting with Dulles, during the course of which he had gained in confidence, Wolff assured the Americans that he would be able to talk the Supreme Commander, Kesselring, around to a surrender and concluded, '*Meine Herren*, have a little patience and I will present you Italy on a silver salver.'[58]

Since that first meeting Kesselring had left Italy to take over from von Rundstedt as Supreme Commander, West. He had been replaced by General von Vietinghoff, a Prussian with iron principles of loyalty to his oath, who still had to be talked around when Wolff, on 19 March, made a second, secret journey across the Swiss border to meet Dulles and Gaevernitz, this time joined by the Deputy Chief of Staff of the US Fifth Army, General Lemnitzer, and the British Director of Military Intelligence, Allied Forces Italy, General Airey. Again Wolff made it clear that he had taken it on his own shoulders to arrange for the surrender of Italy and the German Army Group holding the north of the country. In doing so, he appeared to cut across an approach by Kaltenbrunner, also inspired by Hitler or Himmler, probably to exert pressure on the allies to take the carrot he (Wolff) was offering: this was the threat of fanatical resistance in a fortified 'Alpine redoubt' around Berchtesgaden which, because of the nature of the terrain, would take years to subdue. Kaltenbrunner was offering to bargain away this actually mythical Alpine fortress for a guarantee by the west not to allow Austria to be occupied by the Russians or divided into zones, instead to be an area excluded from war crimes trials. Belief in the Alpine fortress was a major reason for the allies to want the surrender of German forces in Italy, which could otherwise be withdrawn into this redoubt. When Dulles raised the question on 19 March, Wolff took advantage of the story: 'Madness!' he replied. 'It would only bring added suffering to the German people. Everything possible must be done to prevent such last-minute resistance.'[59] He brought up another of Himmler's bargaining counters himself, the political prisoners in concentration camps under threat of Hitler's decree that they should be killed rather than allowed to fall into allied hands.

Whether Wolff was actually playing a larger game and hoping to bring

about a surrender in the west as well as in Italy – carrying out Himmler's intentions on his own account, for it had been made absolutely clear to him that the only terms on offer were unconditional surrender – whether he was manoeuvring to persuade Himmler that he was still acting for him, whether he *was* still acting for him in a deeper scheme than his simple, soldierly bearing indicated to Dulles and his colleagues, is not discernible through the fog of disinformation put up then and since. He told Dulles that he intended going to Kesselring's headquarters in the west to try and enlist his support in persuading von Vietinghoff to surrender the armies in Italy.[60] Presumably he reported to Himmler that he was going to Kesselring to enlist his support for the general conclusion of peace with the western powers. Such was the position when Himmler confided to Heinrici that he had taken steps to negotiate peace in the west. Perhaps he felt optimistic.

Had he learned of Stalin's reaction he might have felt highly optimistic. The Russians had been informed of the talks by the western allies on 12 March. They had not been invited, indeed their request to attend had been turned down on the ground that the object was merely to arrange for a German plenipotentiary to travel to allied headquarters, Italy, for the real negotiations for an armistice – where Soviet officers would be most welcome. Stalin, suspecting or pretending to suspect that the west was dealing behind his back, had his Foreign Minister, Molotov, fire off a fiercely insulting note on 22 March implying that a separate peace was being struck with Germany which excluded the Soviet Union.[61] This came on top of a bitter wrangle between Stalin and the west on the future of Poland. Probably it was intended as a shot in that dispute. However, it is also very possible that Stalin did believe that – as he put it in a subsequent cable to Roosevelt – the negotiations in Switzerland had ended with an agreement with the Germans whereby Kesselring was to open the western front and permit the Anglo-American forces to advance to the east. Anxious as both Roosevelt and Churchill had become about Stalin's post-war designs and overbearing manner, neither would or probably could have deceived him in this way at this stage of the war. On the other hand it is very likely that the fact of Wolff's journey to Kesselring's headquarters in Bad Nauheim after the conclusion of his talks in Switzerland was planted on Soviet intelligence by Schellenberg to foster the impression that a general peace *was* being concluded in the west. Driving a wedge into the enemy alliance had, after all, been Nazi policy for years, and also the policy of the 20 July conspirators, whose ideas Himmler was still soliciting. If this was the case, the visit Wolff paid to Kesselring on 23 March was a part of the overall scheme. He had not severed his links with Hitler and Himmler; he was merely prepared to do so. This seems a more likely explanation of his visit to Bad Nauheim than his own story to Dulles of using Kesselring to persuade von Vietinghoff to capitulate.

Meanwhile disquiet over Stalin's intentions in eastern Europe had led to a major argument between the western allies over strategy. Churchill

wanted an Anglo-American thrust straight for Berlin to secure the Reich capital as a bargaining counter to hold Stalin to the Yalta agreements and balance the prestige the Red Army would acquire shortly when it took Vienna. Roosevelt supported Eisenhower in wanting the main thrust in southern Germany to meet the Red Army on the Danube and seal off the 'Alpine redoubt' before it could be organised for defence. Here it is evident that Kaltenbrunner and Schellenberg had pulled off a coup worthy of Heydrich. Western military intelligence reports on the possibility of Hitler holding out in his impenetrable Alpine fastness, manufacturing armaments and secret weapons in bomb-proof factories hollowed out of the mountains, training elite corps in guerrilla warfare to liberate Germany from the occupying powers read almost as if dictated in the RSHA. Hitler's despatch of elite SS units, especially Sepp Dietrich's Sixth SS Panzer Army to the south-eastern theatre instead of to the Oder, which had so annoyed Guderian, his determination to hold northern Italy, all appeared as confirmation that German strategy was 'directed primarily to the safeguarding of the Alpine zone'.[62]

There were elements of national politicking in the strategic dispute since, if the northern thrust were chosen, the British Field Marshal, Montgomery – anathema to the US generals – would gain the laurels for taking Berlin. With hindsight it is apparent that the way would have been opened for him by German generals in the west, anxious to allow the Anglo-Americans to reach the city before the Red Army. That was not clear at the time. America was by far the senior partner in the western alliance, and on 28 March Eisenhower wired Stalin an outline of his plans which ruled out a direct advance on Berlin. It is not clear whether this message, which drew a sharp protest from Churchill since the strategy had not been endorsed by the combined Chiefs of Staff, was at least partly intended to allay Stalin's suspicions about Dulles' negotiations with Wolff. It appeared to have that effect. Stalin welcomed the plan, and replied that he too was relegating the Reich capital to an objective of secondary importance. On the same day he called a major command conference to finalise plans and preparations for a gigantic assault on Berlin to be launched no later than mid-April.[63]

The sharp disputes and intrigues developing between the three powers and the part played in them by Wolff's manoeuvres in Switzerland might suggest that at five minutes past twelve, as Guderian termed it, Himmler came close to his objective of splitting the enemy coalition. The part played by the 'Alpine redoubt' also poses questions about Hitler's apparently eccentric troop movements, suggesting that he may not have lost that genius for deception which had brought him power and all his successes. However, the lack of restraint shown by the allied leaders in their internal disputes was more a measure of Germany's absolute loss of bargaining power than a last-minute success for the policy of splitting the coalition. With the Reich powerless, it was natural that the allies should squabble over the carcase. That, at least, is the picture that emerges from the documents so far available. Moreover

Himmler's extermination programmes had ruled out all possibility of his acceptance as a negotiating partner by the allies – hence his parallel efforts through Bernadotte, Kersten and the Jewish representatives in Stockholm to indicate his conversion to the dictates of 'wisdom and reason . . . the humane heart and willingness to help'.[64]

Wolff had chosen a bad time to visit Kesselring: spearheads of General Patton's Third US Army had established a bridgehead across the Rhine near Oppenheim the previous night. It is not surprising that the Field Marshal had little time to discuss Wolff's project when he called. However, Wolff sent an optimistic message to Dulles that Kesselring would be ready for further discussion in three days.[65] Was this on his own behalf or intended for Stalin's agents?

From Bad Nauheim Wolff drove on 24 March to Berlin, a tiring journey since he was forced off the autobahn on to side roads by 'deep flying' enemy aircraft strafing anything that moved. He arrived at the Chancellery shortly before noon and was received by Himmler in quarters occupied by his own successor, Hermann Fegelein, outside the damaged and shuttered building; they were joined shortly by Kaltenbrunner. Wolff's story for Dulles, repeated after the war when self-preservation demanded that he keep his American friends and protectors believing he had been acting on his own from the start, was that Himmler reproved him for meeting Dulles without his consent, after which he was subjected to hostile questioning by Kaltenbrunner, who wanted to arrest him on the spot. He talked his way out of the situation by saying that he had succeeded in making direct contact with the west on the pretext of negotiating for the release of a captured SS-Standartenführer. In view of Himmler's methods and multiple sources of information about Wolff's activities this is simply incredible, and makes it virtually certain that, whether he had already decided to repudiate his masters or not, he had returned to Berlin specifically to report on the mission Himmler had ordered him to carry out. Schellenberg's silence on the entire episode supports this interpretation, for, according to Wolff, Kaltenbrunner drove him down to Bavaria the following day to a castle where the SD Berlin offices had been evacuated, and there he was questioned by Schellenberg's experts. Probably he was, but probably it was a debriefing rather than a hostile interrogation.

He returned to Berlin with Kaltenbrunner on the 26th to report to Himmler, who had established his field headquarters at Hohenlychen since leaving Birkenhain. His enemies said that this was because the red crosses painted on the roof of the hospital spared him the danger of enemy air-raids. His two small children by Häschen Potthast were under Professor Gebhardt's protection at the hospital at this time,[66] presumably Häschen as well, and it must be assumed that this was an important factor in his choice of place. Also it was in quiet countryside within convenient distance of Berlin. When Wolff rang him to report that he was back Himmler was annoyed at his late return and said he could not see him; he had been

ordered to Hungary to stiffen German resistance there, and was catching the night train to Vienna.[67]

The reason for his journey to Hungary was to administer exemplary punishment to units of Sepp Dietrich's Sixth SS Panzer Army. Reports of Dietrich's withdrawal in defiance of orders to stand fast had reached Hitler; Guderian, who was with Hitler at the time, described him as going almost out of his mind with rage. The outburst was caused not so much by imminent loss of the oil fields, fatal as this must be, rather by the fact that he had been let down by his loyal guard, the Waffen-SS, not simply the Waffen-SS but his own elite Leibstandarte. He had a message sent by radio ordering all four divisions, Leibstandarte, Das Reich, Totenkopf and Hohenstauffen, to be stripped of their armbands – the stripe on the men's lower left sleeve denoting division or regiment. It seems that these had already been removed for security reasons, but Dietrich, bitter at this reward for five years' absolute commitment at the front, cabled back that he would shoot himself rather than carry out the order. Hitler had commissioned Himmler to go and see that the punishment was administered. Goebbels, who recorded in his diary 'a sort of presentiment of doom' among the military around Hitler, noted that the generals were nonetheless rubbing their hands at this disgrace for their rivals.[68]

No doubt Himmler gave Dietrich's officers one of his quiet exhortations to fanatic resistance; no doubt he hinted to Dietrich that he had opened promising lines to the west. He also took the opportunity in Vienna to speak to the Gauleiter, Baldur von Schirach, about the Jews working in industry and on the repair of roads, railways and bridges. He wanted them taken under the best possible conditions and with the best medical care to Linz or Mauthausen; they were, he said, his soundest investment. Von Schirach understood from this that he wanted to 'redeem himself with his good treatment of the Jews'.[69]

Wolff meanwhile, on his way back to Italy, paid a brief call on his family at St Wolfgang on the Wolfgangsee some twenty miles east of Salzburg and Berchtesgaden and arranged for them to move to the South Tyrol. This suggests that by this date, almost the end of March, having seen the mood of mixed fatalism and fantasy around the Führer and the loss of nerve in the populace, he had made up his mind to renege on his oath and save what he could – at the least that he wanted all his options open, for it would be easier if it came to it to spirit his family over the border to Italy from the Tyrol. Himmler evidently drew this inference when he heard the news. On Easter Sunday, 1 April, the day before Wolff was due back in Switzerland to continue his talks with Dulles, Lemnitzer and Airey, Himmler called him by telephone to tell him that his family was to remain at St Wolfgang; he had taken them under his personal protection, so Wolff remembered the conversation. His wife and boys had become hostages for his loyalty.[70]

As recalled by the member of the signals company at Verona, who made the connection for this 'Blitz Reichsführergespräch', the threat was

(*) How much this hints the possibility of werewolf.

expressed in more subtle terms.[71] After Himmler had announced himself, Wolff wished him Easter greetings.

'Danke schön, Wölffchen, danke schön!' Himmler replied in a weary, resigned voice, then after a short, almost embarrassed pause, 'Tell me, what is this remarkable story about your wife? Yesterday morning, she departed head over heels from St Wolfgang.'

Wolff must have anticipated the question. 'I had news from Salzburg that the mood there was very hostile to Higher SS-Führers, therefore I advised my wife it would be better to take the children into the Reich.'

'Didn't you give any thought to the impression that would make? The Kreisleiter called me up on that account today. I know the position in Salzburg exactly. Affairs have certainly not gone so far as you assume.'

'Of course I will send my wife back to St Wolfgang at once.'

'Do that, Wölffchen, as quickly as possible.'

After some discussion about the prisoner exchange serving as cover for the talks in Switzerland, Wolff asked whether Himmler could tell him anything about the military position.

There was a short pause. 'I still believe as ever, Wölffchen, that all goes well. If not, then we must all just die a heroic death.'

The following day, Easter Monday, Himmler received Count Bernadotte for the second time at Hohenlychen. Bernadotte found him looking 'rather serious and nervous', prepared to admit that the situation was extremely critical – not however without hope. Bernadotte tried to put it to him that if he considered that his country faced disaster his thinking should not be confined to loyalty to Hitler; someone with his immense responsibilities could not simply follow his leader blindly. At this point, apparently, Himmler was called to the telephone, and afterwards the talk was confined to the ostensible purpose of the visit, the Scandinavian prisoners in the camps. After initial refusal to release any, Himmler began to compromise and eventually consented to allow all Danish and Norwegian women and the sick to be taken to Sweden.

Afterwards Bernadotte drove back to Berlin with Schellenberg. During the break in his talk with Himmler he had been asked by Schellenberg once again whether he could not go to Eisenhower and discuss the possibilities for a capitulation on the western front. Impossible, he had replied, the initiative had to come from Himmler. Schellenberg returned to the subject now. Himmler would not hesitate to ask him (Bernadotte) to propose capitulation to Eisenhower were it not for Hitler; the Reichsführer was torn between his desire to save the country from chaos and his vow of loyalty. No doubt Schellenberg was acting on Himmler's instructions when he raised the matter; perhaps that is why he simplified Himmler's extraordinary dilemma: it was not simply that his whole career and organisation had been constructed around loyalty to the Führer, it had also been constructed on absolute hostility to Bolshevism. He could no more consider surrendering to the Russians than Hitler could, and while the western allies

insisted on unconditional surrender, east and west simultaneously, he felt himself unable to do any more than Hitler to stop the fighting. All his attempts at negotiating had been for an exclusively western solution.

On the same day in Switzerland, Baron Parrilli arrived alone for the armistice talks with Dulles, Lemnitzer and Airey. Wolff, he told them, was too depressed to come.[72]

On 12 April President Roosevelt died. Central Berlin was shaking beneath one of the nightly air-raids, the Chancellery and nearby blocks blazing when the Reuter's newsflash was intercepted at about 11.00 p.m. Shortly after midnight Goebbels arrived back from a visit to the eastern front at what remained of the Propaganda Ministry, the greater part of which had been gutted and destroyed by fire a month ago almost to the night. He was greeted with the news on the steps. 'I shall never forget the look on his face,' one of those who had rushed out to meet him recalled later.[73] He stood for a moment transfixed, his sharp features lit by the fires of the city. Then ordering champagne, he summoned aides and press representatives into his study and called the Chancellery bunker on his private line.

'*Mein Führer!* I congratulate you! Roosevelt is dead. This is the miracle of the House of Brandenburg. . . .'[74]

In that taut, fantastical world it is not surprising that the US President's death should have been likened to the death of the Czarina Elizabeth which had brought deliverance to Frederick the Great at the eleventh hour. Hitler, who had already heard the news, suggested to Goebbels that the US Army might soon be exchanging artillery fire with the Red Army over the roof of the Reich Chancellery. He had summoned Speer and Dönitz so that he could tell them personally. When they arrived he thrust the Reuter's message at them, 'Read this! Roosevelt is dead!' His words tumbled out in his excitement, 'Who was right! The war is not lost. . . .'[75]

Himmler does not appear to have been called. Perhaps he was too far away; he was establishing a headquarters at Ziethen Castle, Wustrow, on the Baltic coast to the east of Lübeck Bay, to which he could move when Berlin fell. More probably it was because he was out of favour. Sepp Dietrich's 'failure' in Hungary on top of his own failure to halt the Russian thrust into Pomerania had made a bitter impression on Hitler. Goebbels' diary entry for 30 March had recorded Hitler talking of Dietrich's 'guilt before history', and he noted that 'Himmler's standing with the Führer has accordingly sunk noticeably.' Himmler was a punctilious person, Hitler had told him, but no commander. He totally lacked the divine spark.[76]

Schellenberg, who was summoned to Ziethen Castle on the day Dönitz and Speer reported to the Führer bunker to be included in the rejoicing over Roosevelt's death, found Himmler in great distress over the way he had been almost completely abandoned by Hitler.[77] This was on top of

his continuing indecision about his own responsibilities. Now there was no escaping that militarily the war was lost. The oil fields of Hungary, the industrial and mining regions of Silesia, the Saar and most of the Ruhr had been overrun. US armies stood on the Elbe, with a bridgehead across less than fifty-three miles from Berlin; Soviet armies lined the Oder–Neisse system with a bridgehead less than forty miles from the capital. The Reich had been squeezed into the shape of a sand-glass with the pinched-in central passage scarcely 100 miles wide. Inside this a teeming refugee population of millions, mostly women and children and the old, were moving westwards with prams and handcarts of possessions, away from the Red soldiery towards the Anglo-Americans. In the other direction columns of starving prisoners were forced from concentration camps threatened by the Anglo-American advance; many had already been evacuated from eastern camps. Those who fell or faltered were shot or clubbed to death by their guards.

Himmler took Schellenberg for a long walk in the woods to try and worry out his response to the situation. The questions were those he had been grappling with for weeks. He was terrified that Kaltenbrunner would inform on him to Hitler when Kersten brought a representative of the World Jewish Congress to meet him in a few days' time. Kaltenbrunner would be in Austria, Schellenberg reminded him; Himmler had appointed him his deputy with plenipotentiary powers for the whole southern region if – more properly when – the Reich were cut into two halves by the junction of US and Soviet forces. Himmler was equally concerned about Hitler's sharply deteriorating health and erratic decisions; underlying everything was anxiety over his personal impasse. Schellenberg urged him again to take power from Hitler and surrender in the west. How could he? Himmler asked; he could not confront Hitler with the position and tell him he must resign – he would fly into one of his rages and shoot him out of hand. Nor could he shoot Hitler or poison or arrest him. The military machine would come to a standstill. Such was Schellenberg's account of his state of mind.[78]

No doubt Himmler was correct in believing that any attempt at a coup would lead to chaos. While there were many generals like his own successor, Heinrici, already sidestepping their orders and trying to create a situation in which more Germans, soldiers and civilians alike, would be able to surrender to the western allies, there were others fanatically loyal to their oath and determined to fight to the last. Himmler had contributed essentially to this spirit with his own calls for fanatic commitment, and the setting up of the Werwolf organisation. Only the previous afternoon he had issued a decree which was broadcast several times over the course of the next few days. It opened with the statement that the enemy was forcing the surrender of towns by threatening bombardment by tanks and artillery; the stratagem would not succeed: 'No German town will be declared an open town. Every village and every town will be defended and held with all means. Every German man responsible for the defence of a town who infringes against this obvious national duty loses his honour and his life.'[79]

Goebbels was sending out similar exhortations in daily Werwolf broadcasts. Dönitz was showing equally fanatic commitment: sending naval personnel to strengthen the forces before Berlin, he issued decrees as savage as Himmler's:

> Our military duty, which we fulfil regardless of what may happen to right or left or around us, causes us to stand bold, hard and loyal as a rock of the resistance. A scoundrel who does not behave so must be hung and have a placard fastened to him. 'Here hangs a traitor who by his low cowardice allows German women and children to die instead of protecting them like a man.'[80]

Above all were those at Court like Bormann and Kaltenbrunner whom Himmler could no longer trust. He told Schellenberg on their walk that he and Rudi Brandt were the only people he could trust completely. In these circumstances it does seem that he was right to question the possibility of an SS putsch that would not be betrayed before it began. Jürgen Stroop's recollections tend to confirm Schellenberg's account of Himmler's mood. Stroop reported to him the following day, 14 April, at his headquarters train, 'Steiermark', at Hohenlychen. Himmler appeared overtired and not well, but his hands and nails were, as always, well cared for, Stroop remembered, and he received him extremely cordially, enquiring after his family as he always did. After listening to Stroop's detailed report of the last weeks in his Rhine–Westmark command – congratulating him on his handling of von Kluge's 'suicide' – Himmler gave him a general review of the military and political situation. It was then that he expressed some of his own worries, and characterised Hitler's behaviour as 'peculiar'. It was possible, he said, that the Führer was ill. He went no further, of course. Finally he asked Stroop to join his personal staff at Ziethen Castle from where he intended moving up to Denmark.[81]

Stroop turned down the offer, the first time in his life he had ventured to disagree with his Reichsführer. He was committed to organising a Werwolf group in the Alps, he said. He could not let his men down.

'Do you believe the Third Reich will win the war?' Himmler asked.

'Certainly! Because it is clear that no one and nothing can conquer the Germanic spirit that has been aroused by Adolf Hitler.'

Apparently the answer convinced Himmler that Stroop was not flying southwards merely to save himself and his family. Tears in his eyes, he embraced him, 'If the thousand-year Reich has such loyal soldiers of Adolf Hitler as you, my dear Stroop, then it cannot perish!'

So Stroop parted from him for the last time. To judge by his talks with Moczarski in the condemned cell he remained firm in his loyalty to 'Adolf Hitler' and 'Heinrich Himmler' to the end. 'Loyalty, only loyalty, unconditional loyalty, that is the most important quality of a true man.'

'You speak so often of loyalty,' Moczarski said to him, 'but to whom

should one be loyal? Was it right to remain loyal to people who led your country to catastrophe?'

Stroop became very agitated: they had lost the war only because the intrigues of the reactionary, Anglo-Saxon, Jewish, socialist, communist and masonic Internationale had subverted the *Volk*; they had been too liberal . . .[82]

Shortly before his execution, Stroop was asked by the Polish prison governor whether, as a party to the murder of women and children in the Warsaw ghetto, he had come to terms with his conscience. He felt no remorse that Jews had been murdered, Stroop replied. His arrogant convictions struck all who saw him to the end. He went to the gallows with a calm and soldierly bearing.[83]

On the day he took his last farewell from 'der treue Stroop', Himmler sent a wire in response to queries from the Kommandants of Dachau and Flossenbürg instructing them on no account to surrender their camps to the enemy, but to evacuate them immediately: 'No prisoner may fall into enemy hands alive.'[84] This ran counter to a promise he had given Kersten the previous month that he would not pass on Hitler's destruction order, but instead ensure the camps and inmates were handed over in orderly fashion. The promise had been rendered worthless by both Bormann and Kaltenbrunner, the former by issuing the Führer decree to Gauleiters concerned, the latter by instructing the Kommandants directly. On 7 April it seems Kaltenbrunner had given such an order to the Kommandant of Bergen–Belsen on the British line of advance. The information had reached representatives of the World Jewish Congress in Stockholm who had contacted Kersten, still in Sweden; in a series of night telephone calls to Brandt Kersten had succeeded in getting Himmler to reverse the destruction order.[85] Yet on 14 April Himmler was wavering again with his instructions to Dachau and Flossenbürg to evacuate all prisoners. Presumably this was to cover himself from Kaltenbrunner's and Bormann's machinations and Hitler's rage when he learned that Belsen had been allowed to fall intact into enemy hands.

This happened the next day, 15 April. What was found inside the wire staggered imagination; as recorded in the British Army Report, 'both inside and outside the huts was a carpet of dead bodies, human excreta, rags and filth.' Those inmates still alive tottered or crawled in ragged prison garb, skeletal figures infested with lice, eyes empty of hope or relief or any human feeling.[86]

It was about this date that Himmler ordered Eichmann to report to him. He was planning to negotiate with Eisenhower, he said, and instructed him to go to the Theresienstadt camp immediately and arrange for all the prominent Jews there to be taken to a safe place in the Tyrol so that he could use them as hostages in his negotiations.[87]

Meanwhile he had ordered Wolff back from Italy to Berlin to report; at the same time Schellenberg's chief of intelligence for south-east Europe,

SS-Obersturmbannführer Wilhelm Hoettl, had travelled to Zurich to place the 'Alpine redoubt' squarely on the western bargaining table. Dulles still assumed that the 'redoubt' was an attempt by Himmler and Kaltenbrunner to scotch Wolff's negotiations. Wolff appeared to fear this too. Instead of returning, he sent a report by courier, and when Himmler called him again on the 15th with a peremptory summons to Berlin in person, he left a note for Dulles to say that if he came back he would bring the surrender negotiations to a successful conclusion; if, however, he should be arrested and executed, he asked Dulles to protect his two families and defend his honour by making it known that he had acted not from personal motives but solely 'to save the German *Volk*'.[88] It is evident that on the eve of returning to Berlin to report to Himmler Wolff had to make some such protestations or he could hardly have continued his pretence – if pretence it still was – that he was not acting on his chief's instructions.

At 5.00 a.m. on the 16th the darkness to the east of Berlin was flushed by flames from over 8000 artillery pieces and multiple rocket launchers. Air and earth erupted and merged in thunderous dissolution as Zhukov launched one arm of the final offensive for the Reich capital. Little over an hour later the sky over the Neisse was rent by a similar concentrated bombardment from Koniev's batteries. US forces meanwhile had been halted on the Elbe in keeping with Eisenhower's promise to Stalin. By evening Koniev's tanks had broken through to a depth of some nine miles but Zhukov had met fierce resistance and, spurred by Stalin's displeasure at his relatively poor results, continued to hurl in more armour by night. Such was the position as Wolff flew in to a field strip to the south of Berlin in response to Himmler's summons. He was met by Professor Gebhardt, who drove him to the Adlon Hotel, undamaged parts of which still welcomed important visitors to the capital. Next morning the Professor drove him to Himmler at Hohenlychen.

Again, there is only Wolff's description of his meetings,[89] first cordially with Himmler over lunch, then joined by Kaltenbrunner, who immediately accused him of having negotiated an armistice on the Italian front. He denied it, acting the misunderstood, finally the enraged victim of malevolence while Himmler sat silent and undecided between them. At last, as Himmler appeared unable to settle the dispute, Wolff said they should take it to the Führer. Himmler declined to go himself but agreed to let the Führer decide. So Kaltenbrunner and Wolff drove off together back to Berlin. 'If I am hanged,' Wolff said in an unconcealed threat to reveal Kaltenbrunner's own attempts at negotiations if he accused him before Hitler, 'my place on the gallows will be between you and Himmler.' When they reached the Chancellery Wolff told Hitler that he had succeeded in opening a door to the 'President's Palace' in Washington; apparently he received Hitler's consent to continue his efforts.

'Should you fail,' Hitler told him, 'then I shall have to drop you exactly like Hess.'[90]

So, with a mixture of guile and threat, Wolff, according to his own unverifiable and in part unbelievable account, carried off his second great deception. On the 19th he flew back to Italy to resume his betrayal – on behalf of the *Volk* – of his Führer and the Reichsführer he had been pleased and proud to serve the previous year. It took a further ten days of negotiation and deadly intrigue before he succeeded in bringing about the capitulation of all German forces in Italy, effective from 2 May.

After the war Dulles saved him from being indicted alongside his rival, Kaltenbrunner, and other surviving leaders in the trial of the major war criminals at Nuremberg. At his deNazification process later, Dulles' German expert Gaevernitz spoke up for him and he walked free with Category III, minor accountability, soon reduced to Category IV, fellow-traveller status. Resuming his interrupted career in public relations and assisted by his banking and industrial contacts from the old Freundeskreis, he rode the West German economic miracle, by the 1960s possessing a lakeside country mansion, a higher income and in many respects a more enviable standard of living than he had enjoyed under Himmler. All this was shattered in the wake of Eichmann's capture and trial when he was brought to court himself in Germany on charges of abetting the murder of Jews. Found guilty, he was given the curious sentence of fifteen years in prison, but his American patrons had not forgotten him, nor his friends from the Third Reich, and a way was found of releasing him on grounds of ill-health.[91]

Thereafter he never ceased in public and private to protest the unjustness of his conviction – as his biographer Jochen Lang wrote, a pattern of his generation. As a very young man he had served imperial Germany as an officer in an elite regiment and won the Iron Cross, 1st and 2nd Class, for bravery in the trenches; as Himmler's loyal, thoroughly Aryan right hand he had not flinched at the necessary mass murder to purify the blood of the *Volk*, had won favour with the Führer and, finally entrusted with independent high command, had succeeded in impressing Dulles and Gaevernitz as an honest soldier who had turned against his masters. Afterwards, like the Bundesrepublik itself, he had risen from the ashes of the Reich as a business success. He was the ultimate chameleon. Outwardly he maintained he had nothing on his conscience. Perhaps if he admitted inwardly what he had been party to he might have answered himself defiantly as Stroop answered the prison governor; there is no telling. Before his death full of years in 1984 he had assisted in the preparation of the forged 'Hitler Diaries'.[92]

Since so much of the inner history of the Third Reich in its final convulsions has to be pieced together from the tales of such survivors as Wolff and Schellenberg, it is impossible to know exactly who in April 1945 was plotting against or with whom, or quite how, as the leaders searched desperately for personal escape routes from the ruins. Hitler himself remained true to his convictions. By the time Wolff saw him for the last time it is fairly certain he had decided to stay – and die – in Berlin. On 15 April Eva Braun's bed and dresser had been brought down

from her Berlin apartment to the room next to his in the bunker beneath the Chancellery. Although preparations were being made to transfer Führer headquarters to the Obersalzberg there must have been many in Hitler's entourage who felt, as his secretary Gerda Christian did when she saw his mistress take up residence, that now he would never leave.[93]

Goebbels also appears to have decided to stay – and die heroically – in Berlin. As Gauleiter of the city and mastermind of the Werwolf broadcasts he was determined that no white flags should fly. More significantly he was the creator and custodian of the legend of the Führer and his Reich and he had a vision of how the legend was to be perpetuated down history. He saw it in terms of grand cinema – that at least was how he introduced it to his staff on 17 April – a colour epic showing to audiences down the ages the *Götterdämmerung* in Berlin, 1945. 'Hold out now,' he told them, 'so that a hundred years hence the audience does not hoot and whistle when you appear on the screen.' Apparently his aides thought he had gone off his head.[94]

Himmler's tergiversations in these weeks stand in complete contrast to the consistency of Hitler and Goebbels. He appeared to switch violently between fanatic loyalty to the person of the Führer and his recognisably 'peculiar' decisions, and a vision of himself as the Führer's successor negotiating an alliance with the west against the Russians. Even that idea was split between his hope of proving himself acceptable by releasing prisoners and, on the other hand, using his important group of prisoners as 'hostages' to force a bargain.

The dichotomy was very apparent by 19 April, the eve of Hitler's birthday. On the one hand he had arranged to see two men he still hoped might be a bridge to the west, Count Bernadotte again, ostensibly on behalf of Scandinavian prisoners, and a representative of the World Jewish Congress named Norbert Masur on behalf of Jewish prisoners. Masur had taken his courage in his hands and flown with Kersten to Tempelhof airport, Berlin; thence they had driven to Kersten's country house where they were awaiting Himmler. Himmler was in Berlin, locked in private discussion with the Minister of Finance, Schwerin von Krosigk, about the necessity of ending the war quickly with or without Hitler to preserve German capital assets. On the other hand Himmler had ordered the evacuation of Neuengamme concentration camp, and behind the fighting front his writ for fanatic resistance was being imposed by the special 'flying summary court martial' teams headed by 'mostly very young SS officers . . . blindly fanatical'[95] who hunted shirkers and deserters and hanged them on the nearest tree or lamppost. And shortly before midnight after returning to Hohenlychen, Himmler ordered champagne to toast the Führer's birthday on the hour.[96] Next day he was to drive to Berlin to join the other paladins offering good wishes in person at the Chancellery.

Such behaviour and the way he preserved different fronts of normality to deal with such different characters as Bernadotte, Kersten and Schellenberg,

Wolff, Kaltenbrunner and Stroop, and indeed Hitler himself, could suggest a schizoid personality. According to the theory, he was perceiving or dealing not with the real outer world, but with a distorted version of it generated by his destructively divided ego, viewing the outside world with a 'false-self-system' from which the real 'self' had withdrawn. Loyalty to a Führer who was so obviously draining the precious blood from the *Volk* because they had proved too weak for the struggle, or on the other hand continuing attempts at negotiations with a 'west' which was not going to deal with him both seem irrational and impractical. His breakdown and retreat to Hohenlychen, followed by hectic activity, his suspicions that others were plotting his ruin, were symptoms which might have come from a textbook example of schizoid behaviour.

This reinforces the other indications: his adolescent diaries, obsessive work routine and meticulous performance of duty – 'he is a punctilious person' Hitler had told Goebbels that month[97] – his constant intellectualising and moralising – 'like a man from some other planet' Guderian wrote, his imagination 'vivid and even fantastic'[98] – and above all perhaps the strong suggestion from the concentration camps, medical experimentation and factory murder of sado-masochistic drives: in theory the split 'anti-libidinal' ego persecuting its twin 'libidinal' ego, the real 'self' divided against itself in a sado-masochistic relationship. Applying the theory to his whole career, it could illumine those occasions during the war when he appeared to be travelling with the opposition and with Hitler at the same time – in particular the mystery of his ambivalent attitude on 20 July 1944 – as well as those key episodes before the war when he courted his earliest hero and mentor and actual chief, 'the good Captain Röhm', before stabbing him in the back for Hitler, and did the same again for his other mentor and chief, Gregor Strasser. These events are explicable, indeed predictable, if that quality he liked to stress above all others, loyalty, was simply a part of a 'false-self-system' – the 'ego' of everyday living – which his withdrawn and divided inner self had built up to deal with the frightening outside world. There was no reality, no vitality to it; it was an intellectualisation, dissociated, generalised and dead. In crisis it could only mirror the frustration, anxiety and guilt felt by his tortured inner 'self'. He both wanted his Führer and drew back from him in fear; he wanted the approval of the west and drew back in fear.

It is a beguiling explanation. It may not be correct for his whole life. In extreme situations 'normal' people may experience schizoid dissociation or withdrawal into an inner self observing the body as it were outside as it carries on life in automatic mode. Descriptions by survivors of concentration camps abound in the 'unreal' or dreamlike quality of their lives inside the wire.[99] Hitler was perhaps experiencing such an illusion, observing an automatic Führer-figure moving phantom armies on the maps; the generals and adjutants who played along with the fantasy, Keitel and Jodl and a new Chief of the Army Staff, General Hans

Krebs – appointed at the end of March when Guderian had been unable to cope with the situation any longer – perhaps all in the underground bunker shared the disembodied feeling. Goebbels appears to have been looking on at himself as if at a character in an epic. Similarly Himmler, facing the end with all escape routes barred – by his own rhetoric, by the myth of 1918, by the organisation of the SS and its motto, by the allied agreement on unconditional surrender, and by his own status as the most wanted war criminal after Hitler – and now spurned by Hitler, to whom he had dedicated his life and served exhaustively in the most dread tasks (so he might have reasoned), had every pressure to take refuge in schizoid flight from reality.

Alternatively there is the simple explanation. His nerves were not strong enough for the ordeal: inadequacy he had always sought to conceal with extreme conviction and exhortations to hardness had been exposed by this ultimate test. Like a hunted animal, he was twisting frantically in every direction to find escape, using the methods of guile and camouflage and treachery with which he had climbed to and retained his power.

Hitler's birthday.

On 20 April spearheads of Zhukov's Second Guards Tank Army reached the north-eastern suburbs of Berlin; at 11.00 a.m. the city itself came under fire from his artillery. To the southwards Koniev's armour raced towards Zossen, some twenty miles from the capital, intent on beating Zhukov to the goal. Overhead massed allied bombers greeted Hitler's birthday with sticks of high explosives and incendiaries. It was a public holiday. The faces of women and girls who emerged after the bombs to queue for food were white and tight with fear, images of Russian soldiers behind their eyes. Youngsters of the Volkssturm, manning makeshift barriers of rubble across the streets, held their jumping nerves. Refugees crowded westwards, wheeling possessions around fallen masonry and craters. There was no public transport to impede, only occasional official cars and lorries as the higher bureaucracy and officers cleared out of the ministries and from the other direction the paladins drove in to pay their birthday respects at the Chancellery.

The façade of the building still stood. SS men of Hitler's personal guard with drilled, impenetrable eyes and machine guns manned the entrances and checkpoints; silver death's heads, silver runes shone against black – their honour was loyalty. The grand halls and marble corridors were abandoned or gutted and blackened and strewn with debris; cracked walls were buttressed with timber, windows boarded or blanked with card; masonry dust danced to the thud of nearby shells in shafts of spring sunlight from the gaps in the roof. But the Court of Honour before the old Chancellery building still stood, and there newsreel cameras had been set up to record the ceremony as Göring, von Ribbentrop, Himmler, Goebbels, Speer and other ministers went through the ritual of congratulating Hitler on his fifty-sixth birthday. 'He looked closer to seventy than fifty-six,' one witness

recalled. 'He looked what I would call physically senile.'[100] Afterwards he shuffled out to the cratered devastation of the garden, escorted by Göring, Himmler and Goebbels, to inspect and confer medals on a contingent of Hitler Youth. Did Himmler observe his everyday self performing as it was accustomed in deference to the Führer, smiling encouragement at these – mere boys who had fought the Russians?

From the sun the paladins followed Hitler down the steps, slowly to the artificial light and continuous hum of the air-conditioning in the lower bunker. Hitler received Dönitz, Keitel and Jodl individually in his small conference room, then came out to the corridor which served as main chamber for the daily situation conferences. He looked an old man, Dönitz's adjutant wrote, 'broken, washed-up, stooped, feeble and irritable'.[101] He was urged to leave and establish his headquarters at the Obersalzberg as planned, before the Russians encircled the city and cut off all escape. He was noncommittal, but he agreed the others might leave and that Dönitz should set up a headquarters in the north to take over the defence of that area – a decision he had taken some days previously for the eventuality of the country being divided into two halves by the junction of US and Soviet forces. Himmler was among the many who advised him to leave at once, but what else he said to him, or what manner Hitler adopted towards his long-serving and most loyal Reichsführer, is not recorded. It was the last time they met.

It was also Himmler's last time in Berlin. Probably he conferred with 'Gestapo' Müller and gave instructions about the remaining political prisoners rounded up after the 20 July plot; it would have been unlike him not to leave his desk tidy. Most of the opposition groups had been liquidated, one of the last batches earlier that month after Canaris' diaries had been discovered by accident in a safe in an Abwehr headquarters post. Kaltenbrunner had brought the find to Hitler with some passages marked for his attention. A glance had confirmed Hitler in the belief he had long held: he had been the victim of a gigantic conspiracy to rob him of victory. He ordered the destruction of the whole circle. Müller gave the necessary instructions, and in the early dawn of 9 April at Flossenbürg camp Canaris, Oster, other Abwehr officers and Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer had been led out naked to the gallows; von Dohnanyi, paralysed after ill treatment, had been hanged the same morning at Sachsenhausen.

George Elser, the alleged single-handed assassin of the November 1939 bomb plot in the Bürgerbräukeller, had been liquidated at much the same date at Dachau. Again the order was signed by Müller: Eller, as the special prisoner was known in camp records, had to be taken out and killed inconspicuously during the next air-raid on the environs, his death to be recorded as 'mortally wounded in the terror attack'.[102] Whether Müller's instructions originated from Hitler or Himmler is not known, but evidently he had to be silenced in case the allies surprised the camp and freed the inmates – and the execution had to be disguised.

Another twenty-eight political prisoners were executed that day, 20 April. There remained at least three other groups, one, the most fortunate as it turned out, including Schacht, Halder, Frau Goerdeler – whose husband had already been executed – and others arrested on grounds of kinship, were among those important prisoners whose safety had been entrusted to Eichmann; they were eventually released in the Alps. Other groups were held in the damaged remains of the Prinz Albrecht Strasse building, and in the Lehrterstrasse prison, Berlin. Whether Himmler gave instructions to silence these is not known; it is probable. All Gestapo records were being destroyed; the living testimony was as important, and so far as is known none survived. A few of those in the Lehrterstrasse were killed by Russian shells the next day. The rest were taken out in batches on the night following, placed against a wall and shot. Among these was Albrecht Haushofer.[103]

Almost a year later his mother and father committed suicide together by a stream not far from their Bavarian house, leaving instructions that no memorial or means of identification should ever be placed on their grave.[104]

Two victims known to have been arrested and executed on Himmler's direct orders were Dr Sigmund Rascher and his wife.[105]

17

The End

Himmler drove to Ziethen Castle after leaving Berlin on 20 April. Although he arrived late at night Schellenberg, waiting impatiently to take him to the Jewish representative, Norbert Masur, convinced him that they should go at once. So it was they arrived at Kersten's property, Hartzwalde, at two in the morning of the 21st. Kersten came out to meet them and took Himmler aside before they entered in order to stress the extraordinary significance of this first discussion with a representative of the race the Third Reich had set out to annihilate. It was a chance to show the world and future generations that the harsh policy had been reversed. Kersten knew his patient intimately. The simple way he chose to explain the opportunity before him is as significant for an understanding of Himmler's mind as the response – which Kersten had heard so often before: 'If I had had my own way, many things would have been done differently.'[1]

Inside, Himmler greeted Masur in his friendly manner and the two sat down around a table with coffee with Kersten, Schellenberg and Brandt, who had come with them from Ziethen. Himmler started the substantive discussion, as Schellenberg and Kersten had feared he would, with a historical ramble on predictable lines about the necessity they had been under of solving the Jewish problem in Germany, how he had tried to do so by emigration but none of the countries which pretended to be friendly towards Jews had co-operated. Coming to the war years, he explained the crematoria in the camps in the east as necessary for the thousands of victims of epidemics. After some three-quarters of an hour either Masur – by Schellenberg's account – or Kersten – by his own account – managed to bring him down to concrete proposals for the future. In the end, he agreed that his previous promises that no more Jews would be killed and that the camps would be handed over to the allies intact would be honoured. In the meantime he would release the Jewesses held in Ravensbrück, provided this was kept absolutely secret and as an additional precaution the women were described as Poles. Apparently he had received Hitler's permission to release Polish women from the camp.[2]

It was five o'clock by the time the discussion ended and Himmler said goodbye to Masur. Kersten walked out with him to his car. Before getting in Himmler talked for a while in the self-justificatory manner he always used with his confessor, admitting that the war was lost and that they had

made many serious mistakes; they had wanted greatness and security for Germany but were leaving behind a heap of ruins. For himself, he had always wanted what was best, but so often he had had to work against his real convictions.

> As a loyal soldier I had to obey, for no state can survive without obedience and discipline. It rests with me alone to decide how long I still have to live since my life has now become meaningless. And what will history say of me? Petty minds, bent on revenge, will hand down a false and perverted account of the great and good things I have accomplished for Germany. . . .[3]

As he climbed into the car, and held out his hand to Kersten, thanking him deeply for the years he had treated him with his 'magic skill', his eyes were moist – whether from self-pity or from the knowledge that he would never see his 'Magic Buddha' again is not revealed.

'My last thoughts are for my poor family,' he said before the car drove off.

Kersten travelled to Stockholm a few days later. There the leader of the Jewish delegation expressed doubt about Himmler's assurances. Kersten told him that, from his knowledge of his former patient's character, he would keep his promises.[4]

From Hartzwalde, Himmler, Schellenberg and Brandt drove to Hohenlychen, where Count Bernadotte was waiting. A smörgåsbord breakfast had been laid on in pre-war abundance. Himmler, looking utterly exhausted, but keyed up, gave Bernadotte the impression of being unable to remain long in one spot and of darting from place to place as an outlet for his anxiety. He tried to press delicacy after delicacy on the Count, who was used to simple toast and coffee. When he sat down himself he ate hungrily, drummed with his fingers on the table or tapped his front teeth with his nails – a sure sign he was nervous, Schellenberg explained quietly. Bernadotte pressed him on the evacuation of the Scandinavian prisoners from Neuengamme, and they discussed taking the Jewish–Polish women from Ravensbrück by means of the Red Cross convoy, but once again Himmler did not tackle the central issue of war or peace; again it was left to Schellenberg afterwards on the way back to Berlin to suggest to Bernadotte that he fly to Eisenhower to set up a conference with Himmler. Again Bernadotte said it was impossible; the initiative had to come from Himmler. As they parted he said, thinking perhaps of the smörgåsbord, 'The Reichsführer no longer understands the realities of his own situation. He should have taken Germany's affairs into his own hands after my first visit.'[5]

Returning to Hohenlychen, Schellenberg was called to Himmler soon after midday; he was in bed, 'the picture of misery', and said he felt ill. Schellenberg told him there was nothing more *he* could do; it was up to him (Himmler) now; he had to take some action. After lunch, they drove north to Ziethen Castle. They were held up in endless jams of troops and refugees and just before Wustrow were attacked by low-flying planes. As

they drove on Himmler confided to Schellenberg for the first time that he dreaded the future.[6]

The first test of the agreement reached with Masur came the following day, 22 April. Schellenberg's representative, SS-Obersturmführer Franz Göring, arrived at Ravensbrück and instructed the Kommandant, SS-Sturmbannführer Suhren, to have the women to be evacuated marched to a camp at Malchow, where the Red Cross transports would meet them. Suhren refused, citing the Führer's order passed to him by Kaltenbrunner to liquidate the women on the approach of the enemy. Göring rang Brandt and described the impasse; Brandt contacted Himmler and shortly rang back to the Kommandant with orders to release the women. Suhren, now by Göring's account, completely at a loss, asked about a group of experimental subjects whom he had been ordered explicitly to liquidate – fifty-four Polish and seventeen French women who had been inoculated with disease, then cured by surgery. Again Göring rang Brandt; this time the decision from Himmler took longer, but after two hours Brandt rang back to say that the Reichsführer had ordered the release of the *Versuchskaninchen* (experimental rabbits), as they were known in the camp.[7]

Some 15,000 women were released from Ravensbrück that day and transported to freedom in a fleet of buses of the Swedish, Danish and International Red Cross, leaving about 2000 sick in the women's camp together with some who volunteered to remain behind to look after them.

Meanwhile in the Berlin bunker Hitler had broken down and admitted for the first time that the war was lost. The immediate trigger was the failure of SS-Obergruppenführer Felix Steiner, commanding what had been a reserve army group near Eberswalde rather under thirty miles north-east of the capital. Steiner's forces had been decimated in the fighting over the past weeks and his SS-Panzergrenadier divisions transferred to fill gaps in other sectors; his 'Eleventh Panzer Army' consisted now of little more than a headquarters staff, a police division, naval ratings sent by Dönitz, Luftwaffe ground staff, Hitler Youth armed with hand weapons and fewer than fifty tanks, many without fuel. Whether Hitler realised the extent of the attrition or not, he had ordered Steiner to advance towards Berlin and hurl himself on Zhukov's right flank, then fastened in the northern suburbs of the city. Steiner simply did not obey. Hitler, waiting with rising expectation for news of his attack, sent out repeated requests for information until in the middle of the afternoon situation conference on the 22nd word came that Steiner had not moved. The effect was electric. The blood drained from Hitler's face and he flopped back in his chair trembling. His appearance and manner suggested a stroke or a heart attack. Moments later he ordered all adjutants and aides out. Only Keitel, Jodl, Krebs, General Burgdorf – Hitler's chief military adjutant – Bormann and the stenographer, Gerhard Herrgesell, remained with him, and they witnessed an extraordinary scene as, alternately shouting and sobbing, suffused with colour or blanched, he released the pent-up tensions of months: he had been betrayed, the war

was lost, the Third Reich a failure; he would give up the supreme command and merely conduct the battle of Berlin to its end; he would not surrender, but shoot himself; anyone who wanted to leave could do so.[8] There were naturally many versions of this tirade, which lasted hours; according to the stenographer Herrgesell the cause and central theme was not simply betrayal but betrayal by the Waffen-SS; 'he said that he was losing confidence in the Waffen-SS for the first time. He had always counted on the Waffen-SS as elite troops who would never fail him.'[9]

This was the message Fegelein phoned through to Himmler, back again at Hohenlychen after evacuating Ziethen Castle, apparently after news of the extent of the Russian advances: the Führer was raging that the Wehrmacht had deceived him all along, now the SS was leaving him in the lurch. The report had deeper meaning for Himmler than Fegelein could have guessed, for he had at last taken the decision to betray Hitler himself – at least he had despatched Schellenberg that afternoon to Lübeck, where he hoped he would find Bernadotte. He was to tell the Count that he (Himmler) was prepared to ask him officially and in his own name to take a message of surrender to Eisenhower.[10] Now, however, he phoned Hitler and urged him once more to leave the city before it was too late. No doubt he assured him of his loyalty. No doubt he tried to probe Hitler's mood and discover whether he seriously intended abdication and suicide; despite his recent fall from grace he still considered himself the natural heir.

Afterwards he called Fegelein and arranged to meet him at Nauen on the main road into Berlin from the west some twenty miles from the city centre for a fuller discussion of the significance of the outburst. Professor Gebhardt, who wished to go to the capital to be confirmed by Hitler as head of the German Red Cross – a post he hoped would provide useful cover with the allies – accompanied him in another car. Apparently, Fegelein did not appear at the rendezvous, and Himmler, unwilling or fearing to visit the bunker in person, sent Gebhardt on to offer the Führer the 600 men of his escort battalion for the defence of Berlin. By the time Gebhardt arrived and gained audience, Hitler had recovered sufficiently to show him where he wanted Himmler's men stationed. Before leaving, the Professor asked him whether he had any message for the Reichsführer.

'Give him my love,' was the delphic reply.[11]

Schellenberg eventually caught up with Count Bernadotte next day, 23 April, near the Danish border at Flensburg, and persuaded him to see Himmler that night at Lübeck. They met at the Swedish Embassy there at 11.00 p.m. but were immediately forced down to the cellars by an air-raid. The electricity supply was cut off and Bernadotte, surveying Himmler by candle-light, was struck by his appearance of 'indescribable' exhaustion and nervousness. He seemed to be struggling hard to keep up a façade of calm.[12]

It was midnight before they were able to leave the cellar and start the discussion, still by candle-light. Himmler said that on the last three

occasions they had met, although the situation of the Reich had been hopeless, he had been unable to break his oath to the Führer and attempt to stop the fighting. Now, however, the position was different. Hitler was in Berlin, determined to die with its inhabitants, indeed it was probable that he was already dead – and if not he would certainly be dead within the next few days. He would have died in the struggle to which he had devoted his existence, the fight against Bolshevism.[13]

In this new situation, he went on, he had a free hand. In order to protect as much of Germany as possible and prevent further bloodshed, he was prepared to capitulate on the western front and allow the Anglo-American forces to advance eastwards. And he asked Bernadotte to transmit this message to the Swedish government so they could convey it to General Eisenhower.[14] 'To capitulate to the Russians, however, is impossible for us Germans and particularly for me. We shall continue fighting them until the front of the western powers has replaced the German front.'[15]

Bernadotte could not accept that the west would consider separate peace talks, but he agreed to take the proposal to his government provided Himmler included Norway and Denmark in the capitulation, and allowed the Scandinavian prisoners concentrated at Neuengamme to be taken to Sweden by the Red Cross transports. Himmler agreed and, after consultation with Schellenberg, wrote a brief note for Bernadotte to hand to the Swedish Foreign Minister. It was absolutely non-committal, referring simply to 'a number of problems which I had the opportunity of discussing with him [Bernadotte] today'.[16] It is by no means impossible that he and Schellenberg were still seeking to precipitate the long-expected break-up of the enemy coalition for both knew probably better than Bernadotte that the western powers would neither consider a separate peace nor negotiate with Himmler. More probably it was sheer desperation. After leaving the meeting at about 1.30 in the morning of the 24th, Himmler, who was driving his heavy armour-protected car himself for some reason, started off so quickly that he went straight into a ditch and barbed-wire entanglement, and all of them, including Bernadotte, struggled for some fifteen minutes to get the vehicle back on the road.[17]

Meanwhile the official heir-apparent, Göring, who had flown south to Berchtesgaden, had drawn the same conclusions from Hitler's outburst of the 22nd. He also believed that the only course of action was capitulation in the west while continuing the fight in the east – indeed this was common currency throughout the government and military leadership – but where Himmler went about it in serpentine secrecy, he wired Hitler direct: '*Mein Führer!* In view of your decision to remain at your post in the fortress of Berlin do you agree that I take over, at once, total leadership of the Reich with full freedom of action at home and abroad . . . ?'[18] He was incautious enough to fix a time limit of ten that night, the 23rd; if by then he had received no reply he would assume Hitler had lost freedom of action and would consider himself, as his official deputy, fully empowered to act.

D. T. For years he had been waiting for this moment.

The early deadline set by Göring, and Himmler's remark to Bernadotte that Hitler was probably already dead, indicate that, under the influence of the reports from the bunker, both expected Hitler to shoot himself sooner rather than later. However, Hitler had relapsed into what was probably amphetamine-induced tranquillity after the storm of the previous day, and resumed direction of his make-believe armies as if nothing had happened. Bormann was able to use Göring's wire to persuade him that the Reichsmarschall was usurping his authority and was guilty of high treason. In view of his earlier services to the Party, Hitler was not willing to order the death penalty, but he did agree that Göring should be stripped of all offices and his title of Deputy Führer. Bormann drafted a suitable message and it was sent off about the time Himmler steered nervously out of Lübeck in the dark.

No one in the top leadership had taken Göring seriously for a long time, least of all Himmler. Dönitz's adjutant, Kapitän zur See Walther Lüdde-Neurath, recorded him making a Reichsmarschall joke at the Admiral's dinner table the previous October. '*Donnerwetter!*' Göring was supposed to have said in the wake of the 20 July attempt. 'If that had succeeded I would have had to handle things.' This had brought shouts of laughter; then Himmler, suddenly serious, had turned to Dönitz, 'However, one thing is certain, Herr Grossadmiral, the Reichsmarschall will in no wise be the successor.'[19] Despite his low standing, Göring's removal left Himmler the obvious choice to succeed. He certainly believed it himself. He constructed a shadow Cabinet in his mind, and discussed its composition with Dönitz, who agreed to serve under him, and with von Krosigk, Ohlendorf and no doubt ministers like Speer, who had come north to Dönitz's new headquarters at Plön, between Lübeck and Kiel. Since it was evident that the allies would not treat with Nazis, he decided on a new name for his administration, the Party of National Concentration (Nationale Sammlungspartei). He even took the chair at a military conference after Keitel and Jodl moved out of Berlin to establish Wehrmacht headquarters in the north at Rheinsberg.[20]

Churchill and the new President of the United States, Truman, predictably dismissed Himmler's offer of capitulation in the west and, suspecting another attempt to split the alliance, informed Stalin. When this news was conveyed to Schellenberg he set about arranging yet another – the fifth – meeting between Himmler and Count Bernadotte. However, before that could take place the secret of the negotiations was out. Churchill's Foreign Secretary, Eden, attending a conference at San Francisco, mentioned it to the British Director of Information Services, Washington, who passed it to a colleague at Reuters and on the 28th it was broadcast around the world.

Bernadotte heard it that afternoon while listening to the British 'black' propaganda station Radio Atlantik. It was also picked up at naval headquarters and Dönitz immediately called Himmler. It would be surprising if he had not learned of the talks long since as he and Himmler had conferred almost daily since the Admiral's move to Plön[21] and they

had an identical view of the overall position. Dönitz was still conducting the massive naval evacuation of civilians and troops caught on the Baltic coast behind the Russian advance. According to his account Himmler denied the story, but said he was not going to issue a public statement. What Himmler may have said was that he could not meet Bernadotte again until the fate of the Führer were known. That is speculation but he did not go to the meeting Schellenberg arranged, once more in Lübeck. Schellenberg went alone to meet Bernadotte with Himmler's permission to negotiate on a limited capitulation in Scandinavia.

It was nine that evening before the sensational news of Himmler's earlier negotiation was received in the Führer bunker. It was picked up on Stockholm Radio by one of Goebbels' staff, and handed to Bormann. At the time Hitler was talking to Ritter von Greim, an Air Force general whom he had ordered to Berlin so that he could promote him field marshal and appoint him Commander-in-Chief of the Luftwaffe in succession to the deposed Reichsmarschall. Von Greim, an ardent National Socialist, had flown himself in on the final leg through heavy Russian flak with the rather more ardent aviatrix Hanna Reitsch as passenger – a reckless adventure that had cost him the use of his right foot. Now, three days later, he was still recovering from his wound in the bunker.

When the message was handed to Hitler, the eruption was spectacular. It was the ultimate betrayal – 'der treue Heinrich', longest-serving paladin, chief of his own guard, beside whom all other traitors paled. Hanna Reitsch described him raging like a madman with puce, distorted face and shuffling up and down the corridor of the bunker thrusting the scarcely credible report at everyone he met, all of whom reacted in an equally hysterical or stunned fashion. Finally Hitler retired to discuss the sensation with Bormann and Goebbels.[22]

It seems that the first result of the discussion was the execution of Fegelein. He had been arrested the previous day for two days' absence from the bunker situation conferences. When discovered he was at the flat off the Kurfürstendamm in which he kept his mistress. In the confusion she made her escape, but the arresting officer seized a travelling bag which they had been packing together and this was found to contain a chamois pouch packed with diamonds and other precious stones, jewellery, three gold watches, Reichsmarks, Swiss Francs and false passports. It was not difficult to deduce that he was planning flight. Hitler stripped him of his rank, and he was handed to 'Gestapo' Müller. In his account of the last days in the bunker, James O'Donnell speculates that Fegelein was handed to the Gestapo rather than summarily court-martialled and shot because Hitler and Bormann believed they had at last found the source of leaked intimate information about the personalities around the Führer which had been broadcast for months by the British black propaganda station – namely Fegelein's mistress.[23] However this may be, Fegelein's life was forfeit by the time the news of Himmler's treachery reached the bunker, and he was

executed that night – whether because he was a convenient and obvious target for Hitler's wrath at the Reichsführer, whether, as some accounts have it, because under interrogation he admitted to knowledge of Himmler's treachery, or whether it was because he was believed to be the source of the leaked information will probably never be known.

Afterwards Hitler went into the room where von Greim was lying and ordered him to fly out of the capital, first to organise a Luftwaffe attack on the Russian positions now less than a mile from the Chancellery, second to order Himmler's arrest: 'A traitor must never succeed me as Führer,' he said, his voice hoarse and shaking, lips trembling.

There is a manic surrealism about these last hours in the Führer bunker only surpassed by the real horrors outside. Youths of the Volkssturm, veterans of Himmler's escort battalion, smooth-faced sea cadets and midshipmen from Kiel, and SS units raised in Scandinavia, Belgium, France and the east – 'bewildered young men dragooned from half of Europe', as one of the doctors operating in the emergency casualty station in the cellar of the new Reich Chancellery described them[24] – fought with hand weapons against overpowering matériel odds as the Russians blasted their way towards the city centre with artillery and air power, devastating everything in their path, pulverising the already cratered streets and fractured buildings into unrecognisable heaps and smouldering pits; the defenders were torn, smashed, pulped in the demolition. Minor casualties were forbidden to leave their posts – and most did not for fear of the summary court martial teams and the grisly evidence of their presence hanging from lampposts; those dragged or carried into the overflowing hospitals and cellar casualty stations were usually unconscious and in need of major surgery. Doctors, steeped in blood and dazed with lack of sleep and the ever-lengthening queues of mutilation, heard from those able to speak of the now hopeless battle; 'the younger ones, many under sixteen, were terrified and bawling.'[25] Civilian casualties far outnumbered the military, and the prior stark fear of the women survivors found frightful realisation. Primitive and drunken bands of Red soldiery on the search for prey roamed ruins and cellars where the recently dispossessed huddled for shelter in the dark. The lowest estimate for the number of rapes reported was 90,000; the real figure must have been far in excess.[26] The official figure for suicides in April was 6400.[27]

After the new Field Marshal and Luftwaffe Commander-in-Chief had been assisted up the bunker steps on crutches accompanied still by his dauntless *Genossin*, Hanna Reitsch, thence into an armoured car that was to take the pair to an aircraft waiting on the broad avenue leading to the Brandenburg Gate, Hitler married Eva Braun. She wore a short black dress with gold clasps at the shoulder straps, apparently Hitler's favourite outfit, and looked serenely happy. One of Goebbels' *Gau* inspectors, wearing brown Party uniform with a Volkssturm armband, performed the simple ceremony for a 'war couple' in the small conference room with Goebbels

and Bormann as witnesses. Afterwards the bridal pair were joined for champagne and sandwiches in the study next door by Goebbels and Bormann, Krebs, Burgdorf, Hitler's secretaries and other bunker residents, including Frau Goebbels, who had come earlier in the week with her six children to live and end their lives there. The talk became nostalgic.

In the middle of the party Hitler disappeared with a secretary; he was more concerned with his plans for suicide and posterity than with the ceremony by which he had rewarded Eva's devotion, so shining beside Göring's and Himmler's hollow protestations, and he began to dictate his testament. It was similar in some ways to Himmler's exculpations: during the more than thirty years since he had volunteered for the First World War, which had been forced upon the Reich, he had been actuated solely by love and loyalty to his people. 'It is untrue that I, or anyone else in Germany, wanted war in 1939. It was desired and instigated solely by international finance conspirators of Jewish blood or working for Jewish interests. . . .'[28]

After lengthy restatement of his political creed, he dealt with the succession:

> I expel from the Party the former Reichsmarschall, Hermann Göring. . . . In his place I appoint Grossadmiral Dönitz as Reichspresident and Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces.
>
> Before my death I expel from the Party and from all his offices the former Reichsführer-SS and Reich Interior Minister, Heinrich Himmler. In his place I appoint Gauleiter Karl Hanke as Reichsführer-SS and chief of the German police, and Gauleiter Paul Giesler as Reich Interior Minister. . . .

Bormann's influence is discernible here, although the surprising decision to appoint Dönitz as his successor must have been maturing in Hitler's own mind for some time. It was the Grossadmiral's reward for his fanatical, in the last months blind, devotion, support and optimism that triumphed over every setback. Goebbels was named as Reich Chancellor, Schörner Army Commander-in-Chief, Bormann Party Minister.

Finally Hitler returned to his earliest obsession: 'Above all I enjoin the leadership of the nation and adherents to scrupulous observance of the race laws and merciless resistance to the world-poisoner of all peoples, international Jewry.'

By the time the testament was ready for signing it was four in the morning of the 29th. He also made a private will, in which he paid tribute to Eva Braun, who 'of her own free will entered this city which was already besieged, in order to share my fate. At her own desire she goes to death with me as my wife. . . .'[29]

Later that morning copies of the political testament were entrusted to reliable officers who were instructed to break through the Russian cordons in the city and take them to Dönitz and the new Army Commander-in-Chief, Schörner. In the afternoon Hitler had his Alsatian, Blondi, put down with

poison, an unmistakable sign that his own suicide was close, and gave cyanide capsules to his two secretaries; he wished, he told them, that his generals had been as reliable as they.

That evening at the situation conference the Kommandant of Berlin, General Weidling, described a hopeless position with ammunition running out, no air drops, the Russians within the government quarter and only four blocks from the Chancellery; he believed the fighting must come to an end within twenty-four hours and asked permission for his forces to attempt a mass break-out. Hesitant with reluctance, Hitler gave permission for small groups to try – only to withdraw it later. He still retained faint hopes of relieving 'armies' supposed to be closing on the capital. At one the next morning, the 30th, even this was extinguished: a message from Keitel indicated that all these forces were on the defensive or encircled. Evidently Keitel had gone over to the traitors and was holding the generals back deliberately, so it was perceived in the underground imagination. Bormann wired Dönitz with a Führer order to proceed at once, ruthlessly against all traitors. Hitler and Eva Braun committed suicide together that afternoon, 30 April. Afterwards the corpses were carried up to the garden, laid side by side and soaked with petrol; Russian artillery sounded nearby as the petrol was ignited and Bormann, Goebbels and the few other witnesses to the funeral spontaneously stiffened in the Hitler salute.

In his testament Hitler had explained his new appointments as necessary 'to give the German people a government of honourable men to fulfil the duty of continuing the war with all means'. Goebbels and Bormann, the new Chancellor and Party Minister, despatched a message to Dönitz that evening to inform him that he had been appointed Hitler's successor in place of Göring – without telling him that Hitler was already dead – then made contact with the Russians and arranged for General Krebs and an interpreter to pass through the lines to negotiate a cease-fire. The aim, as they told General Weidling that night, was to inform Stalin and only Stalin of Hitler's death, and arrange a local cease-fire in order to allow the new government to assemble in Berlin and capitulate to the Soviets.[30] Krebs set off early the following morning, 1 May, arriving at the forward command post of General Chuikov shortly before four. Directly he told him of Hitler's suicide and read out the testament naming the new government, Chuikov telephoned his chief, Marshal Zhukov, who phoned Moscow and roused Stalin. Stalin forbade discussion with Krebs 'or any other Hitlerites'; Krebs was informed that the only terms were unconditional capitulation to the USSR, USA and England.

a last attempt to set up division?

Krebs continued to argue doggedly for Soviet recognition of the new German government and an armistice for negotiations, but hours of circular talk returned always to the same block: the Russians would only accept unconditional surrender to all the allied powers. Krebs could not deliver this since Dönitz, the new head of government, knew nothing of the latest events in Berlin.[31]

It was not until that afternoon, after Krebs had returned to report in person on his fruitless talks, that Goebbels and Bormann accepted that their bid to split the enemy coalition had failed and sent Dönitz news of Hitler's death: 'Führer died yesterday 15.30 hours. Testament of 29.4 transfers to you the office of Reichspresident. . . . Reichsleiter Bormann intends coming to you today to clarify the position. . . .'[32]

That evening Frau Goebbels administered poison to her six children, and some time afterwards she and the little club-footed doctor climbed the bunker steps and emerged into the darkness of the garden, where they took poison together. Like Hitler, Goebbels shot himself in the temple as he bit on his capsule.

Such is the story of the last two days in the bunker as it has emerged from the residents who survived and from the Russian records of Krebs' conversation and the messages sent. How much accords with the legend Goebbels wished to foster, how much is hearsay from rumour or even fabrication will remain debatable.

Bormann and the others (apart from Krebs and Burgdorf, who committed suicide) now prepared to break out in small groups through the Russian ring and from the city – at which point Martin Bormann disappeared from the historic record.

Himmler had received the first indications of his banishment on 29 April when von Greim and Hanna Reitsch – having cheated the Russian gunners by taking off *with* the wind over the Brandenburg Gate, just clearing the heroic statuary – flew in to Plön and informed Dönitz that the Führer had ordered the Reichsführer's arrest for treason. There was little Dönitz could do: Himmler had a substantial entourage of high SS officers and a large part of his formidable escort battalion. After the war the adjutant responsible for his security, SS-Sturmbannführer Heinz Macher, himself a much decorated fighter of the dreaded division Das Reich, described these men as 'the most piratical, bravest and experienced warriors to be found in all Germany'.[33] Besides, Dönitz needed all the organs of internal security and intelligence that Himmler still controlled in the northern zone and in occupied Norway, Scandinavia and Holland, and the units he controlled by virtue of his position as Chief of the Replacement Army and the Volkssturm.

It is evident that they were co-operating closely. Macher recalls that Himmler visited Dönitz's headquarters practically every day, driving over with a detachment of his escort in a motorcade from headquarters he had established in the police barracks, Lübeck. He was at Plön again on the 30th, the day after von Greim arrived. Top of the agenda for discussion was the response that should be made to the Gauleiter of Hamburg, who had expressed the determination to spare the city further destruction by surrendering it to Montgomery's troops – if necessary leading his people against any German forces sent to stop him. After the discussion Dönitz sent a message to the Gauleiter stressing the vital importance of holding

the line of the Elbe against the western allies. Since the Russians were expected to sweep on westwards beyond the demarcation line of their zone as agreed at Yalta, this suggests that Himmler was still seeking to provoke the break-up of the enemy coalition, and Dönitz was accepting his political judgement.

It was while Himmler was driving back to Lübeck after this meeting, slowed by constant enemy air attacks and the streams of refugees and disheartened troops foot-slogging on all roads, that Dönitz received the astonishing news he had been appointed Hitler's successor. Albert Speer, who was with him when his adjutant, Lüdde-Neurath, brought in Bormann's message, appeared equally stunned and took a moment or two to recover sufficiently to offer his congratulations. That, at least, is the story perpetuated after the war, although Speer more or less admitted that Hitler had probed him on his opinion of Dönitz's suitability during their penultimate conversation in the bunker.[34] Dönitz told Lüdde-Neurath to request Himmler's presence at once, meanwhile to take the necessary precautions. His own precaution, according to his memoirs, was to hide his pistol under papers on his desk, safety catch off.[35] The implication is that, despite the graphic descriptions brought by von Greim and his intrepid mistress of the scenes in the Führer bunker when Himmler's treachery had become known, Himmler was still behaving as the obvious successor, and was still regarded as such in the northern area, as indeed all memoirs agree.

Lüdde-Neurath sought out Korvetten-Kapitän Ali Cremer, who was in command of the U-boat men guarding the headquarters, and told him to be prepared for anything. 'Himmler will not like our chief becoming the Führer's successor.' Cremer stationed his men behind trees around the building.[36]

Directly Himmler saw Dönitz's summons after his return to Lübeck, he called Macher. 'This I don't like. We've just left him. Something must have happened. Please take enough men.'[37]

Macher picked out thirty-six of his most reliable, battle-hardened veterans and they drove back to Plön in a convoy of armoured troop carriers and open Volkswagens. It seems probable that they arrived about midnight. The blacked-out buildings were just visible in the faintest moonlight. Macher sensed that all was not as it should be, and jumped out alone. A single officer walked out to meet him, the glint of the Knight's Cross at his throat; it was Cremer. Half-turning, Macher made out the shapes of the men Cremer had stationed in the trees. 'Oh God, those poor bastards!' he thought. 'We'll blow them away with the greatest of ease.'[38]

It did not come to it. After friendly greetings Macher and Cremer and five large SS men escorted Himmler to the building, where Lüdde-Neurath conducted him to Dönitz's room and left the two together. What was said will never be known. By Dönitz's post-war account he simply handed Himmler Bormann's message and watched as his face paled with surprise and dismay.

He had evidently taken a seat for after a moment's consideration he rose, bowed to congratulate Dönitz and said, 'Allow me to be the second man in your government.' There could be no question of that, Dönitz replied. He had no use for him. Himmler then tried to convince him of the advantages he would gain by having him in his administration. Dönitz was 'amazed by his belief that he had great resonance abroad'.[39]

It is difficult to understand why Himmler should have been surprised by the message since von Greim had left no doubt that he was considered a traitor in Berlin and barred from the succession. The rest of the opening vignette is entirely credible. He must have been shocked that the successor was Dönitz, a political innocent, whom he was advising. Yet he would have accepted it; the habit of obeying Führer orders was ingrained. No doubt he displayed that old-world formality mixed with geniality which gave an impression of aloofness – or, as Speer expressed it, behind which he sheltered from familiarity.[40] And no doubt he offered his services because he had convinced himself, as most memoirs agree, that his intelligence and police functions would be indispensable to any German government accepted by the allies. Whether Dönitz refused him curtly is another matter. It was not a decision he had to make at once. Neither of them knew that Hitler was dead, indeed Bormann's earlier message enjoining Dönitz to proceed at once, ruthlessly, against all traitors, had ended: 'The Führer is alive and conducting the defence of Berlin.' Both thought he was still doing so for at 1.22 in the morning, after they had been talking for an hour or so, Dönitz broke off the discussion to send a reply to the wire from Bormann which had occasioned the meeting:

> '*Mein Führer!* My loyalty to you will be unshakeable. I will therefore undertake further attempts to relieve you in Berlin. If fate nevertheless compels me to lead the German Reich as your appointed successor, I will conduct this war to an end befitting the uniquely heroic battle of the German *Volk*. Grossadmiral Dönitz.[41]

Whatever was discussed at that late-night meeting, it was not the comparatively short affair Dönitz suggested in his memoirs. They resumed talking after this wire was sent while Macher and two other SS officers drank Hennessy brandy with Lüdde-Neurath and Cremer in the canteen, and dawn was up before they broke off for breakfast. Before travelling back to Lübeck the SS party met von Greim and Hanna Reitsch, who took the opportunity to berate Himmler for betraying the Führer. 'That is high treason, Herr Reichsführer,' she said after asking for a private word.

'High treason? No. You'll see, history will evaluate it differently. Hitler wanted to continue the fight. He was mad with his pride and his honour. He wanted to shed more German blood when there was none left to flow. Hitler was insane. It should have been stopped long ago.'

'Hitler died bravely and honourably,' she retorted, 'while you and Göring and the rest must now live branded as traitors and cowards.'

'I did what I could to save German blood and rescue what was left of our country.'[42]

It is not surprising that Schellenberg, who reported back at Lübeck that morning, 1 May, found Himmler 'in the worst possible mood. He was playing with the idea of resigning, and was even talking of suicide.'[43] When Schellenberg tried to discuss his negotiations over Denmark and Norway Himmler was too nervous and distracted to listen; in any case, he said, he could no longer take any action. Instead he took Schellenberg with him to Plön to report on his talks.

It is evident from this account as well as from the record of their subsequent meetings that Dönitz had not told Himmler he had no use for him;[44] had he been sacked, Himmler would not have talked of resigning. He was, of course, indispensable, particularly in the present situation. The people and the majority of the troops in the north were as disaffected by the continuing futile struggle and the daily strafing by allied aircraft as the Gauleiter of Hamburg. To maintain the fight as Dönitz clearly intended – both out of loyalty to his Führer, and so that he could continue his naval rescue of Germans from the east and from undoubted Red Army atrocity, internment and, as he believed, slavery – he needed the fearful sanctions dispensed by Himmler's organisations, SD, Gestapo, Geheime Feldpolizei. He did not shrink from them. His naval police, nicknamed *Kettenhunde* (chain-dogs) from chains of office around their necks, were as notorious as Himmler's flying court martial teams: trees along the plains of Brandenburg and Holstein bore their terrible warnings: 'Here hangs a traitor who by his cowardice allows German women and children to die instead of protecting them like a man.'

Himmler and Schellenberg arrived at Dönitz's headquarters at two in the afternoon of 2 May; Dönitz invited them to lunch. Himmler brought the news that the Gauleiter of Hamburg was still determined to surrender the city,[45] and Albert Speer, who was present, offered to drive over and attempt to dissuade him. His mission was overtaken by events as British tanks were reported in the streets of Lübeck. They had broken out of a bridgehead across the Elbe at Lauenburg, some twenty-five miles south-east of Hamburg, and raced north to the Baltic coast in order to prevent the Russians advancing across the base of the Schleswig-Holstein–Danish peninsula and so reaching the North Sea – the very possibility Himmler had been hoping to exploit to prise the alliance apart.[46]

A hasty evacuation northwards was imperative – Plön was scarcely thirty miles from Lübeck – and Dönitz ordered the transfer of his headquarters to the Navy Cadet School, Mürwik, near Flensburg, hard up against the Danish border and beyond the line of the Kiel Canal, which would provide a defensible tank ditch. Meanwhile it had been decided to send a delegation under Generaladmiral von Friedeberg to Montgomery to offer a local capitulation of German forces in the north. It was a tactic to get around the west's refusal to accept one-sided surrender while still

buying time to rescue the German troops and civilians trapped in the east.

Dönitz arranged to meet von Friedeberg to give him his instructions personally at the Levensau Bridge over the Kiel Canal that evening on his way north, and took with him von Krosigk, whom he had decided to appoint Foreign Minister. Himmler told Schellenberg that he had persuaded Dönitz to make this appointment during their all-night discussion. It was his final triumph over von Ribbentrop. The meeting was delayed as Dönitz's car was strafed by low-flying aircraft which forced him and von Krosigk to jump out and dive for the ditch.

The SS headquarters motorcade, also making for Flensburg, was caught in a full-scale air-raid on Kiel. The leader of the Belgian Waffen-SS travelling with the convoy in a Volkswagen driven on potato Schnapps has left a vivid picture of SS generals, police Führers, staff and secretaries throwing themselves over garden walls in blind confusion while Himmler, wearing a leather crash helmet and sitting in the driving seat of his heavy Mercedes at the head of the column, shouted '*Discipline*, gentlemen! *Discipline!*'[47]

Later that night Himmler was joined in his car by Dr Werner Best, one of the intellectuals Heydrich had recruited for the SD in the early days, now Minister Plenipotentiary in Denmark. During their discussion about Schellenberg's negotiations and the policy to be adopted for the occupied Scandinavian countries, Himmler said he was certain that if he had been allowed even half an hour with Eisenhower he could have convinced him of the necessity of joining forces with them to drive the Russians back.[48] Forced by the threat from the air to make a detour, it was three next morning, 3 May, before he finally steered his column into Flensburg. He asked Best to take the SS women staff with him across the border into Denmark so that they could have a wash and something to eat before returning to work.

Best was back across the border later that morning to attend a conference Dönitz had called at his new headquarters in the Cadet School, Mürwik. Berlin had capitulated the previous afternoon; German forces in Italy had surrendered. US and British troops had shaken hands with the Russians in the north and in the centre of the country. The main question on the agenda was whether Dönitz should shift his headquarters to Denmark or Norway – or even Prague – to continue the struggle from outside the Reich. The Reich Commissar for Norway, Josef Terboven – who had begun his Party career in 1927 as the plant of the ultra-reactionary coal baron, Emil Kirdorf – the Commanders-in-Chief of Norway and Denmark and Keitel and Jodl believed that he should. Werner Best, Speer and von Krosigk argued against it. Dönitz deferred any decision until he had heard the result of von Friedeberg's armistice proposals but he sent his trusted right hand from the U-boat war, Admiral Godt, and his son-in-law Günther Hessler on a special mission to spy out the land in Norway.

Von Friedeberg returned late that night with Montgomery's answer:

he was prepared to accept the surrender of all forces on his western and northern flanks – Holland, Friesland, Schleswig-Holstein and Denmark – but not Army Group Vistula fighting the Red Army on the eastern front. Dönitz called a meeting of his Cabinet next morning, 4 May, to discuss the terms. Himmler drove up in his Mercedes and escorting staff cars in the panoply of Reichsführer-SS and chief of the German police and argued that Holland and Denmark should not simply be given up; they and Norway were valuable trump cards which could be used to bargain for concessions. He was supported by Jodl, who was convinced that the enemy coalition must break up now that Germany was about to be partitioned and they should fight on until this happened.[49] Their arguments did not persuade the meeting. On the one hand there were too many indications of disaffection among troops and civilians – threatened uprisings and mutinies; on the other hand Montgomery's conditions seemed to fulfil the twofold aim of saving further bloodshed and destruction in the west while allowing them to carry on the struggle against the Russians in order to bring more Germans from the east into the western zone. Probably it had simply been borne in on Dönitz, now that the Führer's death had had time to sink in, that further struggle was pointless. It is even probable that, like his chief civilian advisers, Speer and von Krosigk long before, he had seen a chink of light in the west and had begun to think of working his passage that way.

At all events he sent von Friedeberg back to Montgomery's headquarters to sign the surrender of German forces in the stipulated areas, and that evening after hearing from him that the cease-fire had been concluded, to take effect at eight o'clock the following morning, 5 May, he sent out the necessary instructions to military and naval commanders. After his fanatic edicts and rhetoric of fighting to the last man, Dönitz's sudden conversion to reason came as such a surprise that some naval officers suspected that the enemy had penetrated the code and sent a fake signal.

For Himmler, the cease-fire in the north marked the end of the road. His life's work was finished; as he had told Kersten, only ruins remained. He had lost his Führer, thus the clear guiding principle – above all he had lost his Führer's trust. The mystical symbol of authority had passed to Dönitz. There is ample testimony to his confusion in the weeks leading up to this moment, but surrounded by his entourage and the realities of title, uniform and power he had played up to the part expected of him. Now that Dönitz had given up the struggle against the west there was no more he could do. Hitler was no longer there to give him the ultimate backing he had always expected in crises. Moreover the oath which all members of the armed forces had pledged to the Führer was now due to Dönitz as his legitimate successor. Dönitz had claimed it in his first address to the armed forces immediately after his accession on 1 May. That was the trump card, and it was the card played by Himmler's enemies, and all those around Dönitz desperate to avoid charges of war crimes by shifting the odium on to the SS and the person of the Reichsführer.

Now Dönitz told Himmler he had to go. How he did it and whether he explained that it was necessary because he had to distance his government and the German armed forces and people from the crimes of the regime will never be known, nor how easy or difficult Himmler made it for him. Perhaps this was the time Himmler tried to convince Dönitz of his great resonance with the west. But he went quietly. In January he had written to his doubting Propaganda officer, d'Alquen, 'one is only at the end if one is beaten in the heart.' This was his position now.

Still he did not let it show. The following evening, 5 May, the day of the cease-fire, he gathered his entourage, including Ohlendorf, Hans Prützmann of Werwolf, Rudi Brandt, his brother Gebhard, many departmental chiefs, police and Waffen-SS leaders, Rudolf Höss, formerly Kommandant of Auschwitz, and gave a final, farewell speech. There is no written record, and the subsequent accounts are contradictory. That given by his first biographer, Frischauer, who probably heard it from Gebhard Himmler, is perhaps the most likely. Himmler hinted that destiny had a great new task for him but did not say what it was. He would have to undertake the task alone, but a few of them might accompany him.[50]

Rudolf Höss described this speech, but only as it affected him. He did not mention any task, certainly not Werwolf. 'There was no more talk of fighting,' Höss wrote. 'Save yourself, who can, was the watchword.'[51] He could scarcely believe his ears or eyes. The world had fallen in, 'our world', yet there was Himmler, beaming and in the best of humour telling them to go into hiding.

> If he had said: '*So, meine Herren*, it is over, you know what you have to do,' that I would have understood – that would have conformed to what he had been preaching for years to the SS: self-sacrifice for the idea. *So* however he gave us our last order: 'submerge in the Wehrmacht!' That was the dismissal from the man, whom I had looked up to so much, in whom I had such firm faith, whose orders, whose remarks were gospel to me. . . .[52]

He and a colleague, Maurer, looked at one another dumbly. Yet each had his family to think of, and they obeyed this last command, Höss wrote. No doubt they were relieved that there was to be no final suicidal stand. They had already been provided with false papers and positions in various arms of the Wehrmacht; the Concentration Camp Inspectorate seems to have 'submerged' *en masse* in the Navy. Höss's chief, Glücks, went to a naval hospital post; Höss became Bosun's Mate Franz Lang in the Navy Signal School on the island of Sylt. Like the others he carried a phial of cyanide with him.[53]

Himmler had provided himself with the papers of a former sergeant in the Geheime Feldpolizei named Heinrich Hitzinger; the real Hitzinger had been executed for defeatism. He carried at least two phials of cyanide and had had a hole drilled in his molars to take one of them. No doubt all

these preparations had been made ostensibly for Werwolf. There can be no doubt that he was clear about his fate and those of his chief accomplices should they fall into enemy hands.

Von Krosigk and Ohlendorf claimed afterwards that they told him his duty was to go straight to Montgomery and take the responsibility on his own shoulders for all that the SS and indeed the Nazi regime had done. Von Krosigk, once a Rhodes Scholar at Oriel College, Oxford, from whence he had returned to Germany a convinced Fabian socialist, had served Hitler faithfully from 1933 onwards – until the collapse; Ohlendorf, whom Himmler called the keeper of the Holy Grail of Nazism, had led one of the most infamous Einsatzgruppen in mass murder in Russia. If they did advise Himmler to give himself up it was an impertinence. Apparently he told them that political developments would favour him. He would go into hiding and await them.[54] This sounds likely, and he was, of course, correct about the cold war. One of his female secretaries, Doris Mehner, who had had cause to be grateful for his thoughtfulness in the early morning of 3 May – when he had asked Werner Best to take the secretaries across the border for a bath and breakfast – recalled that when he said farewell and thanked her for her services, he told her to go back to Bavaria and rest. They would soon meet again; then there would be a great deal of work to do.[55] He was still convinced that, after the inevitable split between east and west, he and his organisation would hold the balance for order in central Europe. Whether this was the schizoid flight from reality or whether he was simply preserving face before his followers must remain speculative, but there seems little doubt that he did maintain a most extraordinarily confident public front.[56]

Von Friedeberg meanwhile had been despatched to Eisenhower's headquarters at Rheims to try and arrange a similar local cease-fire with the Americans in the central and southern sectors. He was told that surrender must be unconditional to all the allied powers simultaneously. When he reported this early on 6 May Dönitz sent Jodl to Rheims. He got equally short shrift from General Bedell Smith, acting for Eisenhower. The Americans had liberated Buchenwald concentration camp recently, and were under the influence of the nauseous scenes there. Photographs had been published in the service paper *Stars and Stripes*; von Friedeberg was given copies to take back to Flensburg with him and Jodl was given an hour to obtain authority for unconditional surrender, failing which the talks would be broken off. When this message was received from Jodl, the most obstinate advocate of continuing the fight in the east, Dönitz and his Cabinet finally gave up. At 2.30 in the morning of 7 May, Jodl signed the formal end of the war on all fronts, effective from midnight, 8 May. The allied celebration parties were already under way.

Dönitz and his colleagues had one final task – to distance themselves and the armed services from the crimes of the regime they had served. 'We have nothing to be ashamed of,' Dönitz decreed. 'We stand without

a spot on our honour as soldiers and can with justice appear full of pride and honour. . . .'[57] And a few days later – after Keitel had been arrested – Jodl stressed to his staff that their attitude to the enemy powers had to be:

> They [the enemy] have conducted the war for the sake of the [international] law. Therefore we wish to be handled according to the law. We must continually point out international law to the allies. . . . We should stress to the allies the point at which our compliance in matters of the capitulation treaty ceases, that is if our honour should be attacked. . . .[58]

As part of this unsavoury humbug – which was carried on for the next twenty or thirty years, indeed to this day, with such easy success that it must have astounded and perhaps even convinced the perpetrators themselves – the most notorious of Hitler's ministers had to be formally rejected. Thus Dönitz had letters of dismissal typed out for Goebbels, Bormann, Rosenberg, still Minister for the Occupied East, Thierack, Minister for Justice, and Himmler. Whether Himmler received his is doubtful; it was found in Dönitz's desk, unsigned, after he and his 'government' had been unceremoniously rounded up on 23 May and transported to prison cells:

> Dear Herr Reichsminister – In view of the present situation, I have decided to dispense with your further assistance as Reich Interior Minister and member of the Reich government, as Commander-in-Chief of the Replacement Army, and as Chief of Police. I now regard all your offices as abolished. I thank you for the service which you have given to the Reich.[59]

After Hitler, whose death was as yet unknown to the western allies, Himmler was the most wanted Nazi, and there were many rumours that he had been sighted, or was making his way with a picked SS band to the mountains. He was, it seems, lying low in Flensburg with Häschen Potthast, his two children, Ohlendorf and others including Professor Gebhardt, who described him in later testimony as 'so lonely' in this final period during the British occupation.[60] On 10 May, he left Häschen and, accompanied by Brandt, Ohlendorf, Professor Gebhardt, Heinz Macher and his military adjutant, Werner Grothmann, set out by car to make his way to Bavaria,[61] thence, according to Stroop, to join those many other SS-Führers who had gone south-east to establish Werwolf in the Alps. Certainly Hans Prützmann preceded him and, according to Stroop, organised the crossing of the Elbe.

Here they had to leave the cars and continue on foot, mixing in the straggles of refugees and soldiers making their way home, sleeping in the open or in railway stations or farmers' haylofts. Himmler had shaved off his moustache, donned a black patch over his right eye and wore the uniform of a sergeant in the Geheime Feldpolizei; his two adjutants were disguised as privates in the same organisation – a hierarchy that was, perhaps, indicative of his need to be superior. In the event it led to his downfall, for the Geheime Feldpolizei was one of the organisations on the

allied black list, and sergeants and above were subject to automatic arrest. Another thing Himmler did not know was that British intelligence had been tipped off by the Danes that he was making his way south to Bavaria, and they were on the lookout.

His disguise, although theatrical, was effective, no doubt because the patch broke up the distinctive dark line of his brows. Nevertheless, on 21 May, he and his two adjutants were arrested as members of the Geheime Feldpolizei at a British control point near Bremervörde, midway between Hamburg and Bremen. They were transported to a camp at Westertimke, near Bremen, searched and interrogated. Himmler was not recognised, but since he and his party had come from Flensburg and possessed notes issued in Flensburg, they were sent to an interrogation centre at Barfeld, near Lüneburg, where those with even remote knowledge of the Nazi leadership were concentrated.[62] He and his two adjutants arrived there at some time after noon on the 23rd.

Himmler had still not been recognised – at least by the British – but he now declared himself. Why he did so remains a mystery. The answer probably lies in the state of his mind rather than any external pressures from fellow prisoners or his adjutants or the fear of discovery.

In schizoid theory it was entirely predictable. The pressures had mounted to such an extent that his real, inner self was attempting as a last, desperate defence not so much suicide as murder of that 'false self' which it was observing.

On a non-analytical, commonsense level it can be imagined that after nearly a fortnight on the run, sleeping rough, then caught and subjected to the humiliations of search and interrogation, bundled into army trucks as a completely undistinguished prisoner, Himmler's sense of his worth and dignity was outraged; perhaps he simply needed to assert his status. He had been under immense nervous strain, with the necessity of keeping up a confident public face for months; he may just have snapped. Or the realities of captivity under enemy occupation may at last have broken into the illusion of his underground 'mission' in the Alps, although not, it seems, his illusion of his 'resonance' with the allies.

It was lunchtime, by the recollection of one of the intelligence officers at Barfeld camp, Chaim Herzog – later President of the State of Israel – when the Sergeant-Major reported to the commanding officer, Captain Selvester, that three of the newly arrived prisoners were insisting on seeing him; one claimed to be Heinrich Himmler. Selvester went to his office and had the men sent in. As he recollected twenty years later, one was small and ill-looking, the other two tall and bearing themselves like soldiers – Grothmann and Macher. Sensing something unusual, he ordered the two large ones taken away and held apart from the other prisoners. The smaller one then removed an eye-patch he was wearing and put on a pair of spectacles. 'His identity was at once obvious,' Selvester recalled, 'and he said, "Heinrich Himmler" in a very quiet voice.'[63] The story as

it reached Chaim Herzog was that he stood to attention and said, 'Ich bin der Reichsführer-SS.'[64]

Selvester then sent for an intelligence officer to interrogate him, and called Montgomery's chief of intelligence, Colonel Michael Murphy, at Second Army headquarters, Lüneburg. While waiting for Murphy to drive over, Himmler's signature was tested against a facsimile, and he was stripped and given a full body search. Two small brass cases were found in his clothes, one containing a glass phial which he claimed was medicine for his stomach cramps. Selvester assumed it was poison and guessed the phial from the empty case was in his mouth. Hans Prützmann, who had been captured earlier, had committed suicide by biting on a poison capsule two days before, and no doubt Selvester had heard about it. In any case he ordered thick bread and cheese sandwiches and tea for Himmler and watched him closely as he ate. He noticed nothing.

Murphy had given instructions that Himmler was not to be interrogated before he arrived. Nevertheless, the intelligence officer could not resist showing him pictures of the piled corpses and living skeletons found at Buchenwald and asking for his comments.

Himmler countered with the question, 'Am I responsible for the excesses of my subordinates?'[65]

Since all concentration camp Kommandants, officials and guards captured had pleaded superior orders for their actions, this brought the question of responsibility full circle.

Selvester had a British Army uniform brought in for Himmler in place of the uniform he had been living in for days, but he refused it, apparently worried that he would be photographed wearing it; all he would accept were boots, socks, underpants and a shirt, around which he wrapped an Army blanket.[66] Selvester, watching him keenly over the period of hours he was in his custody, found it 'impossible to believe that he could be the arrogant man portrayed by the press before and during the war'.[67] Himmler showed himself concerned for his two adjutants, asking repeatedly about their whereabouts, and seemed quite prepared to talk, and almost jovial at times. His main object, it appeared, was to gain an interview with Montgomery or even Churchill to offer his organisation to stem the Russian advance threatening western Europe.

Chaim Herzog recalls that Himmler could easily have passed for a small, anonymous clerk but 'his eyes, it was noted at the time, were steely and bereft of all expression.'

Colonel Murphy arrived at about eight that evening and had Himmler taken out unceremoniously in his blanket and bundled into his car. According to Herzog, Murphy was 'using all forms of epithets including "Come on you bastard!" or "We'll teach you!"'[68] Himmler probably did not understand the colloquialisms but the abusive manner must have been unmistakable. He was driven to Second Army headquarters outside Lüneburg, where an interrogation centre had been established in a red-roofed villa, No. 33

Uelznerstrasse, whose windows looked out through limes bordering the street to the pine forests of Lüneburg Heath. There, in a room on the first floor, Sergeant-Major Austin gave him much the same treatment. Austin had been looking after Hans Prützmann in this same room when he had committed suicide, and both he and Murphy were very conscious that Himmler was probably carrying the second poison phial in his mouth. He pointed to a couch and ordered him to strip.[69]

Himmler stared, according to the account Austin gave the press the following day, saying 'He does not know who I am.'

'Oh, yes I do,' Austin replied. 'You're Himmler. *Ausziehen!* Get undressed!' Himmler continued trying to stare him out, then lowered his gaze, sat on the couch and undressed. He was subjected to another thorough body search by a Second Army doctor, C.J.L. Wells, who told him to open his mouth. Wells saw a small black knob protruding between a gap in his teeth on the lower right-hand side.

'Get up and come closer to the light,' he said, indicating the window.

Himmler did as he was told, and opened his mouth again. Wells was about to put his fingers inside over the black knob – the stopper of a glass phial of potassium cyanide – when Himmler jerked his head away to the side, flicked the phial out with his tongue and crushed it between his teeth. Did images of Bavaria flood the timeless moment as the poison stunned his nerve centres . . . *Das Brauneck dort so freundlich schaut, zum Geigerstein als seine Braut* . . . 'What a miserable creature is man. . . . The heart is turbulent until it rests in the ground' . . .

He was jumped by Austin and Colonel Murphy, who up-ended him on the floor and held his feet high while Wells gripped his throat. He had already lost consciousness. Emetics and a stomach pump were tried, but at some time during the undignified struggle over the next fifteen minutes his life left him – the official time of death was 11.04 p.m., 23 May. A naked, awkwardly shaped body lay on the floor surrounded by splashed water, buckets and swabs, the detritus of the fight to save him – and the red-faced officers who had let their prize catch slip away perhaps looked at one another in justified confusion. Himmler was transmuted in his favourite analogy to a link in the eternal chain between ancestors and future generations, a pulse in the German blood – in the bloodstream of Europe and mankind.

Two days later Sergeant Austin baled his corpse in camouflage netting, tied it round with Army telephone wire, dropped it in the back of a lorry and drove off to inter it on Lüneburg Heath. He dug the grave himself. 'Nobody', he reported, 'will ever know where he is buried.'[70]

The few belongings Himmler had had with him on his last journey were distributed among the intelligence staff at headquarters. Niall MacDermot of counter-intelligence had his black eye-patch and glasses. The glasses were thick; it was clear he had been very short-sighted. The case bore a Munich optician's name. MacDermot kept them for several years until,

coming across them one day, in a moment of disgust he threw them in the rubbish bin.[71] He presented the eye-patch to the chief of Danish intelligence to thank his service for their assistance. It can be seen in Copenhagen, a reminder of the improbable manner in which Himmler, when all around sought to disclaim any association with him, also chose to deny the Reichsführer-SS.

Index

Names have been omitted from this index if they occur in a secondary or commentating role, for example, those of authors (with exceptions), witnesses to events and victims who are otherwise unknown and who appear only once.

Abwehr; *see* Canaris
Adam, Wachtmeister, 503, 506
Ahnenerbe, 170–1, 202, 248, 374, 437–8, 477, 533–4
Airey, Gen., 573, 577, 579
Anschluss, 200, 211–2, 217–22, 225, 230, 233, 235–6
Artamen Society, 37, 68, 85, 90
Aryan myth, 33, 68–70, 81, 104–5, 204, 245, 250, 401, 406, 484, 521
Aryanisation, *see* Jews, persecution of
Auschwitz, 310, 321–2, 333–5, 345, 359, 373–4, 377, 389–96, 398, 417, 431, 433–4, 438–41, 470, 475, 482–3, 486, 545, 547–9, 606

Bach-Zelewski, Erich v.d., 342, 442, 524–5, 527, 538, 562
Bamler, Rudolf, 215–6
Barbarossa, *see* Hitler, attacks Russia
Bauer, Erich, 416
Bavaria: nationalism and separatism, 21, 31, 54, 63–4, 109, 126; Volkspartei (BVP), 31, 47, 54–5, 64, 72, 79, 127, 131, 141; Soviet (Räte) Republic (1919), 36, 41, 75
Becher, Kurt, 545, 548
Beck, Ludwig, 160, 214–8, 226, 230, 236, 421–2, 424, 498, 506, 513
Belsen, 582
Belzec, 372, 397–8, 417, 431
Berchtold, Joseph, 86
Berger, Gottlob, 279, 297–8, 301, 316, 324, 326, 371, 442–3, 474–5, 478, 488, 538, 556
Berling, Sigmund, 527
Bernardis, Robert, 498
Bernadotte, Count Folke, 565–6, 576, 578, 585, 591, 593–6
Bernstorff, Gräfin v., 165, 247, 319, 424
Best, Werner, 111, 135, 197, 219, 361, 377, 604, 607
Birkenau, *see* Auschwitz
Blaskowitz, Johannes, 287, 290
Blessing, Karl, 500
Blomberg, Werner v., 120, 122, 146, 155, 160–2, 209, 211–18, 230
Bock, Fedor v., 421
Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, 421–3, 529, 588
Bor-Komorowski, Tadeusz, 523, 526–7, 541
Bormann, Martin, 112, 245, 251, 264, 272, 282, 307, 346, 350, 356–7, 361, 366, 379, 412–3, 416, 419, 427, 455–6, 464–5, 469, 473, 483, 497, 499, 506, 515–8, 529–31, 535, 537, 539, 545–6, 554, 561, 564, 566–7, 571, 581–2, 592, 595–62, 608
Bouhler, Philipp, 260–2, 303, 331, 348

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Chapter 7: Expansion

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50 10.12.1944; Kersten, p. 239
51 See Wheeler-Bennett (Dep. Head Political Warfare) to Eden and Churchill, 25.7.1944; PRO FO 371/39062; cited Lamb, op. cit. (ref. 35 above), pp. 296–7
52 See M. Gilbert, pp. 754 *ff*
53 Broszat (ed.), p. 164
54 K. Becher testimony; IMT II, pp. 369–72; cited Fleming, p. 168
55 See v. Lang, Sibyll (eds), p. 212 and see Irving's suggestion that Hitler wanted to free the Jews for currency; Irving, p. 717
56 v. Lang, Sibyll (eds), p. 235
57 Schellenberg, p. 429
58 2.12. and 8.12.1944; Kersten, pp. 204, 229
59 Trevor-Roper (ed.), *Bormann Letters*, p. 140
60 31.10.1944; cited Manvell & Fraenkel. p. 206
61 Churchill to Eden, ?.12.1944; cited Lamb, op. cit. (ref. 35 above), p. 298
62 IMT VI, p. 228
63 Ibid., p. 245
64 Ibid., p. 247
65 Cited v. Lang, Sibyll (eds), p. 247
66 Ibid., pp. 253–4; M. Gilbert, p. 753
67 Dr Kastner; cited v. Lang, Sibyll (eds), pp. 254–5
68 29.11.1944; Kersten, pp. 203–4
69 Broszat (ed.), p. 143
70 v. Lang, Sibyll (eds), p. 224
71 Broszat (ed.), p. 143
72 R. Weiss, *Journey through Hell*, London, 1961, p. 189; cited M. Gilbert, p. 765
73 A. Oppenheimer testimony, Eichmann Trial, 7.6.1961, sess. 68; cited M. Gilbert, p. 763
74 V. Dupont testimony; IMT VI, pp. 250–1
75 IMT VI, p. 309
76 A. Balochowsky, testimony; ibid., p. 307
77 Ibid., p. 314
78 Ibid., p. 311
79 M. Lampe testimony; ibid., p. 191
80 V. Dupont testimony; ibid., pp. 251–2
81 Broszat (ed.), p. 143
82 24.4.1943; IMT 1919 PS; cited Smith, Petersen (eds), pp. 200–1
83 IMT 682–PS; cited IMT VI, p. 379
84 See Bericht an den Reichsschatzminister der NSDAP, 28.10.1944; Boberach, 17, pp. 6721, 6722–6
85 H. Cappelen testimony; IMT VI, p. 283
86 Bericht . . . , 28.10.1944, op. cit. (ref. 84 above), p. 6726
87 H. Cappelen testimony; IMT VI, p. 286
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92 Captured, unposted letter; cited Wilmot, p. 582
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94 G. Berger to RFSS, 21.12.1944; Heiber, p. 299
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96 H.H. present card index, reproduced in v. Lang, pp. 372–3
97 R. Baumert (Stabsführer Pers. Stab RFSS) to R. Brandt, 27.12.1944, and Anlage; Heiber, pp. 300–1
98 RFSS to M. Ruhland, 11.1.1945; Heiber, p. 302

Chapter 16: Fall from Grace

1 Erickson, p. 447
2 Descriptions by Adml Assmann; cited Irving, p. 750; and G. Boldt; cited Bullock, pp. 703–4
3 Hestons, p. 140
4 See Salewski, 2, p. 522; Padfield, pp. 388–9
5 F/Vorträge, 22–23.1.1945; Nav. Lib.
6 Ibid.
7 Cited Stein, p. 235
8 See Irving, p. 759
9 Fragments of Führer Conferences No. 24, 27.1.1945; cited Wilmot, pp. 626–7
10 Guderian; cited Manvell & Fraenkel, p. 208
11 R. d'Alquen to G. d'Alquen, 26.1.1945; IWM H/13/231
12 SS-Stuf. Kriegbaum (for d'Alquen) to R. Brandt, 28.1.1945; IWM H/13/232
13 RFSS to R. d'Alquen (enclosed in

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86 Br. Army report; cited M. Gilbert, p. 794
87 v. Lang, Sibyll (eds), p. 258
88 See Dulles, *Surrender*, p. 158; v. Lang, pp. 278–9
89 See v. Lang, pp. 279 *ff*
90 Ibid., p. 282
91 See ibid., pp. 322–39
92 Ibid., p. 350
93 O'Donnell, pp. 132–3
94 Trevor-Roper (ed.), *Goebbels Diaries*, intro., p. xxxii, citing R. Semler, *Goebbels The Man Next To Hitler*, 1947, p. 56
95 J. Thorwald, *Die grosse Flucht*, Stuttgart, p. 427; cited Stein, p. 247
96 Schellenberg, p. 442
97 30.3.1945; Trevor-Roper (ed.), *Goebbels Diaries*, p. 281
98 Guderian, op. cit. (ref. 27 above), p. 422; cited Manvell & Fraenkel, p. 215
99 See Laing, p. 78
100 Capt. P. Hartmann; cited O'Donnell, p. 52
101 W. Lüdde-Neurath, *Regierung Dönitz*, Musterschmidt, Göttingen, 1953, p. 27
102 Hoffmann, pp. 305–6
103 See ibid., p. 632; Douglas-Hamilton, p. 236
104 See Douglas-Hamilton, p. 242
105 See Alexander, *Prolonged Exposure*, pp. 19–20

Chapter 17: The End

1 21.4.1945; Kersten, p. 286
2 See Schellenberg, p. 444; Kersten, pp. 286–9
3 21.4.1945; Kersten, p. 292
4 27.4.1945; ibid., p. 293
5 Schellenberg, p. 445
6 Ibid., p. 446
7 F. Göring's declaration, 24.2.1948; Schellenberg Defence Exhibit 36; NA; cited Fleming, pp. 179–81
8 See O'Donnell, p. 138; Trevor-Roper, *Last Days*, p. 118; G. Boldt, *Hitler's Last Days*, Sphere, 1973, p. 118
9 Herrgesell to P. Knauth, *Time*, 21.5.1945; cited Stein, p. 242
10 Schellenberg, p. 448
11 Trevor-Roper, *Last Days*, pp. 125–6
12 Hewins, p. 129
13 See ibid., p. 139; Schellenberg, p. 450
14 See Hewins, p. 139; Fleming, p. 183, citing Report on the Case of W. Schellenberg, 1980, p. 104; NA
15 Ibid.; cited ibid.
16 Cited Fleming, p. 184
17 Schellenberg, pp. 450–1
18 Cited Trevor-Roper, *Last Days*, p. 130
19 Lüdde-Neurath, op. cit. (ref. 101, ch. 16), p. 38
20 See ibid., p. 86
21 H. Macher to F. Lynder; cited Padfield, p. 403
22 Captain Work's Interrogation Summary, 'The Last Days in Hitler's Air Raid Shelter', 8.10.1945; NA; see also Trevor-Roper, *Last Days*, p. 169; O'Donnell, p. 240
23 See O'Donnell, pp. 213 *ff*. But according to Hanna Reitsch in 'Interrogation Summary . . .', op. cit. (ref. 22 above) Hitler simply ordered him shot for desertion
24 Prof. E.-G. Schenck; cited O'Donnell, p. 177
25 Ibid., p. 172
26 Mayor E. Reuter; cited O'Donnell, p. 202
27 Ibid., p. 201
28 Cited e.g. Lüdde-Neurath, op. cit. (ref. 101, ch. 16), pp. 120–1
29 Cited Bullock, pp. 726–7
30 See Erickson, p. 607
31 Ibid., p. 614
32 Cited Padfield, p. 410
33 H. Macher to F. Lynder; cited Padfield, p. 408
34 See Speer, *Erinnerungen*, op. cit. (ref. 75, ch. 16), p. 482
35 K. Dönitz, *10 Jahre und 20 Tage*, Athenäum, Frankfurt, 1958 (1963 edn), p. 346
36 A. Cremer to F. Lynder; cited Padfield, p. 408
37 H. Macher to F. Lynder; cited ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 K. Dönitz, *40 Fragen an Karl Dönitz*, Bernard & Graefe, Munich (4th edn), 1980, p. 164; Lüdde-Neurath, op. cit. (ref. 101, ch. 16), pp. 86–7; Padfield, pp. 408–9; Steinert, pp. 62–3
40 Speer, *Erinnerungen*, op. cit. (ref. 75, ch. 16), p. 489
41 Padfield, p. 410
42 Hanna Reitsch in 'Interrogation Summary . . .', op. cit. (ref. 22 above)
43 Schellenberg, p. 455
44 And see Steinert, pp. 119–20: 'May 4th, the RFSS Heinrich Himmler, has placed himself at the disposal of the Gr. Admiral for the solution of the refugee problem and the maintenance of public order.'
45 Speer, *Erinnerungen*, op. cit. (ref, 75, ch. 16), p. 495

Glossary

Abwehr Armed Forces secret- and counter-intelligence service
Anschluss German union with Austria (1938)
Barbarossa codename for the German invasion of Russia (1941)
Eindeutschung the reclamation of German racial stock for the Reich from foreign peoples
Endlösung final solution, a common German notion at this period, here used chiefly in connection with the 'Jewish question'
Gestapo *Geheime Staatspolizei*, Secret State Police
GFP *Geheime Feldpolizei*, Secret Military Police
HSSPF Higher SS and police leader (Führer), Himmler's regional commander
KPD Communist Party
Kripo *Kriminalpolizei*, Criminal Police
Lebensunwertes Lebens beings unworthy of life
Machtergreifung Nazi seizure of power (1933)
Minderwertigen those of inferior value
OKH *Oberkommando des Heeres*, Army High Command
OKW *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*, Armed Forces High Command
Ordnungspolizei uniformed police
RFSS Reichsführer SS
RSD *Reichs-Sicherheitsdienst*, (SS) Reich Security Service (Führer-protection)
RSHA *Reichs-Sicherheitshauptamt*, (SS) Reich Security Head Office
RuSHA *Rasse und Siedlungshauptamt*, (SS) Race and Settlement Head Office
SA *Sturmabteilung*, Nazi paramilitary arm
Schutzhaft Protective custody
SD *Sicherheitsdienst*, (SS) Security Service
Sipo *Sicherheitspolizei*, (SS) Security Police
Sippenhaft arrest of kin
SPD Social Democratic Party
SS *Schutz Staffeln*, literally Protection Units
SSPF SS and police leader (Führer), Himmler's district commander
Totenkopf Death's Head
Verfügungstruppe the first SS field troops

55 See Smith, p. 79
56 Thewelweit, p. 61
57 Ibid., p. 434
58 H.H. diary, 4.11.1919
59 Ibid., 1.12.1919
60 Ibid., 21.12.1919
61 Ibid., 24.12.1919
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
64 H.H. book list, No. 36
65 Ibid., No. 23; and see Smith, p. 74; Ackermann, p. 25
66 H.H. diary, 15.12.1919
67 Ibid., 26.12.1919
68 3.3.1920; HD Roll 98, folder 2; cited Smith, p. 90
69 H.H., G.H., I. Zahler to Himmler parents, 24.3.1920; ibid.
70 H.H. diary, 24.11.1921
71 H.G. Adler; cited Ackermann, p. 25
72 H.H. book list, No. 47
73 Ibid., No. 51; cited Smith, p. 91
74 By J. Howald; book list, No. 61; see Smith, p. 59
75 By Mayrhofer; book list No. 59; see ibid.
76 Ibsen, p. 20
77 H.H. diary, 27.5.1922
78 Ibsen, pp. 86–7
79 Ibid., p. 222
80 H.H. book list, No. 65
81 H.H. diary, 6.11.1921
82 Lu Zahler to H.H., 22.11.1920; T–175, Roll 99, Frs 2619999 *ff*
83 Kaethe Loritz to H.H., 6.12.1920; ibid., Frs 2619888–91
84 H.H. quotation collection; HD Roll 98, folder 2; cited Smith, p. 107
85 H.H. diary, 1.11.1921
86 Ibid., as dated
87 Ibid., 29.1.1921
88 Loewenberg, p. 635; see also Angress & Smith, p. 210
89 H.H. diary, 26.1.1922
90 Ibid., 11.11.1921; 22.2.1922; 24.2.1922; see Smith, p. 113
91 H.H. diary, 5.2.1922
92 Ibid., 28.11.1921
93 Ibid.
94 Ibid., 3.7.1922
95 Ibid., 27.5.1922
96 H.H. book list, No. 106
97 H.H. diary, 9.6.1922
98 See G. Franz, op. cit. (ref. 39 above), p. 332
99 See Strasser, *Mein Kampf*, p. 35
100 H.H. diary, 24.6.1922
101 Ibid., 26.6.1922
102 Ibid., 29.6.1922
103 Heygate, p. 35
104 Ibid., p. 36
105 H.H. diary, 17.6.1922
106 Ibid.

Chapter 3: Revolutionary

1 See H.H. to SS-Gruf Pohl, 29.11.1941; Heiber, p. 89
2 7.11.1922; cited Smith, p. 130
3 Koehl, p. 13, estimates Nazi Party membership, summer 1923, as *c.*55,000; SA as max. 10,000 (München *c.*2000; Franken *c.*3000; Landshut *c.*1500; others *c.*3000)
4 Smith, p. 134
5 München, 13.4.1922; cited Bullock, p. 86
6 H.H. diary, 29.1.1921
7 Unfinished draft, Schleissheim, 18.4.1923; HD MA Roll 98, Hoover File No. 1
8 Weilheim, 6.7.1923; T–175, Roll 99, Frs 2620195–200
9 Weilheim, 4.3.1924; ibid., Fr. 2620204
10 Weilheim, 4.3.1924; ibid., Frs 2620205–6
11 München, 23.5.1924; ibid., Frs 2619757–9
12 München, 22.5.1924; ibid., Fr. 2619756
13 *The Times*, London, 12.11.1923
14 München, 13.6.1924; T–175, Roll 99, Fr. 2620053
15 Enclosed with above, Fr. 2620049
16 E. Weckerle to G.H., 1.8.1924; *IfZ* microfilm MA 320–234; cited Ackermann, p. 27
17 H.H. to H. Gärtner, 25.1.1924, annex to Gärtner's 2.2.1937 report for the Honour Book of the Old Guard; BA NS 26/1222; cited Ackermann, p. 37
18 H.H. book list, No. 205
19 Ibid., No. 190
20 Ibid., No. 191
21 H.H. diary, 17.2.1924
22 H.H. book list, No. 181
23 Ibid., No. 189
24 Smith, p. 141
25 H. Günther, *Ritter, Tod und Teufel*, Munich, 1920 p. 143; cited Ackermann, p. 111
26 Fermor, p. 104
27 H.H. book list, No. 202
28 Ibid., No. 220
29 Ibid., No. 180
30 Ibid., No. 171
31 Ibid., No. 176
32 Ibid., No. 207
33 Ibid., No. 208
34 Ibid., No. 43
35 Ibid., No. 148
36 Ibid., No. 175

23 Cited Calic, p. 24
24 Aronson, p. 24
25 Cited ibid., pp. 23–4
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid., p. 259
28 See p. 56
29 DC SS-Pers.-Akt. Heydrich; cited Aronson, p. 311
30 Cited Aronson, p. 38
31 Ibid., p. 35
32 See Calic, pp. 58–9
33 v. Lang, p. 65
34 W. Best, Aufzeichnungen, 1.10.1949; BA; cited Calic, p. 85
35 See Koehl, p. 56
36 See Calic, pp. 88 *ff*
37 List in Aronson, pp. 318–19
38 Berghahn, p. 5
39 Koehl, p. 53
40 Gossweiler, p. 288
41 H. Frank, *Im Angesicht des Galgens*, Munich, 1953, p. 108; cited Stachura, p. 106
42 Ibid.
43 See Calic, pp. 101 *ff* citing Hans-Peter von Heydebreck
44 IMT PS–3337; cited Gossweiler, p. 295
45 Ibid., pp. 205–6
46 See Gossweiler, pp. 206 *ff*; Abraham, p. xxxvii; Pools, p. 464
47 Cited Bullock, p. 222
48 Cited ibid., p. 224
49 See Calic, p. 129
50 Aktenvermerk: T–175, Roll 88, Fr. 2611416
51 30.1.1933; Fromm, p. 72
52 Aktenvermerk; T–175, Roll 88, Fr. 2611416
53 2.2.1933; Fromm, p. 72
54 Cited Diels, p. 81
55 Aronson, p. 154
56 Fromm, p. 73
57 *The Times*, London, 28.2.1933
58 Diels, pp. 192 *ff*
59 Cited Diels, p. 194
60 See for instance Fromm, p. 74; Calic, p. 113
61 Fermor, p. 130
62 DC SS-Pers.-Akt. Heydrich; cited Aronson, p. 311
63 Diels, p. 91
64 Cited Berben, opp. p. 1

Chapter 5: Night of the Long Knives

1 Frischauer, p. 46
2 See Aronson, pp. 113–14
3 Eicke to H.H., 10.8.1936; cited Aronson, p. 106
4 Broszat (ed.), p. 67
5 Ibid., p. 58
6 See B. Bettelheim, *The Informed Heart*, Illinois, 1960, p. 225
7 Broszat (ed.), p. 61
8 Ibid., p. 60
9 Diels, p. 135
10 Ibid., p. 136
11 Frischauer, p. 45, states that Himmler's library indicates that he was seeking inspiration from Torquemada and Fouché.
12 File note of Staatsanwalt Stepp, 6.12.1933; cited Aronson, p. 326
13 Aronson, p. 131
14 Berben, p. 62
15 Ibid., p. 4
16 See ibid., pp. 231–4
17 Broszat (ed.)., p. 56
18 Berben, p. 114
19 Ibid., pp. 112–13
20 Cited Aronson, p. 169
21 Strasser, *Mein Kampf*, p. 45
22 OSAF Order 1403/33, 8.9.1933; cited Aronson, p. 326
23 v. Lang, pp. 362–3
24 Heiber, p. 20
25 Moczarski, pp. 103–4
26 Ibid., p. 104
27 Heiber, p. 20
28 Frischauer, p. 62
29 5.4.1939; v. Hassell, p. 55
30 14.3.1934; cited Aronson, p. 326
31 Führertagung SS-Oberabschnitt E, Breslau, 19.1.1935; B NS 19/1092
32 29.12.1933; BA NS 19/271; cited Ackerman, p. 72
33 Diels, p. 92
34 Ibid., p. 408
35 Ibid., pp. 409–12
36 Ibid., p. 379
37 Ibid., p. 385
38 Ibid., p. 386
39 v. Lang, p. 34
40 Lützows' notes; cited Diels, p. 416
41 18.12.1938; v. Hassell, p. 39
42 O.v. Heydebreck to E. Calic; cited Calic, p. 146
43 Ibid., p. 147
44 Stachura, p. 123
45 Overy, p. 30
46 See Gossweiler, p. 433
47 Ibid., p. 276
48 See ibid., p. 270; Vogelsang, p. 154
49 See Vogelsang, pp. 149–50
50 See Aronson, p. 154
51 Führerbesprechung der SS-Gruppe Ost; DC Sch. 425/3; cited Aronson, p. 53
52 See Abraham, pp. 217–18; Gossweiler, p. 464
53 Winterbotham, p. 54

Dirlewanger, Oskar, 442, 524–5, 527, 538
Dohnanyi, Johannes, v., 214, 230, 287, 421–4, 529, 571, 588
Dominican order, 5–9, 72
Dönitz, Karl, 412, 414, 416, 454, 463–6, 469, 473, 483, 493, 502, 509, 513, 515–6, 518, 537, 558–9, 564, 579, 581, 588, 592, 595–6, 598–605, 607–8
Dora, 482, 487–8, 552
Duisberg, Carl, 97–8
Dulles, Allen, 427, 489, 530, 544–5, 560, 572–7, 579, 583–4

Eberl, Dr Irmfried, 397, 452
Eberstein, Karl v., 96, 105–7, 110–11, 295, 428
Eckart, Dietrich, 70, 87
Eckart, Graf du Moulin, 105, 111, 113
Eckhardt, Prof. Karl, 170, 192
Eden, Sir Anthony, 209, 554, 595
Ehlich, Dr Hans, 347, 363
Eichmann, Adolf, 11, 198–200, 229, 270, 275–7, 303, 334–5, 341, 345, 348–9, 352, 357–9, 373, 395, 417–8, 431, 475, 482–3, 548–9, 553, 555, 582, 584, 589
Eicke, Theodor, 128–30, 134–5, 145, 157, 159, 181, 183, 267, 278, 299, 310–11, 316, 370–1, 377, 432, 551, 563
Eindeutschung, *see* SS RuSHA
Eisenhower, Dwight, 407, 493, 555, 566, 575, 578, 582–3, 591, 593–4, 604, 607
Elser, Georg, 282–6, 588
Endlösung: *see* Jews, Final Solution, *and see* Himmler, and final solution of Jewish question
Ernst, Karl, 141, 161
eugenics, *see* Race hygiene
Eulenburg-Hertefeld, Prince, 98, 102
euthanasia programme, 260–2, 276, 303–7, 331, 333, 335, 345, 348, 358, 364, 371–3, 397; '14f13', 331, 345, 390, 476
extermination camps: *see* Auschwitz, Belzec, Chelmno, Majdanek, Maly Trostenets, Sobibor, Treblinka; *and see* Jews, Final Solution

Farben, I.G. Co., 97–8, 105, 114–7, 119, 129, 147–50, 152, 206–9, 321–3, 393, 486, 550, 552
Fegelein, Hermann, 294–5, 466, 480, 546, 576, 593, 596–7
Fellgiebel, Erich, 496, 503–4, 508
Final Solution: *see* Jews, Final Solution *and* Himmler, final solution of Jewish question
Finke, Dr E., 437
Fischer, Dr Eugen, 363
Flossenbürg, 195, 582, 588
Förster, Albert, 275, 297–8
France: historical, 18, 31; capitalism, 150, 160; geopolitical, 150–1, 160, 202, 211, 235, 251, 257; *and see* Czechoslovakia, German take-over
Frank, Hans, 126, 128, 131–2, 275–6, 291, 297, 305, 307, 357, 367, 399
Freemasons: *see* Himmler, Attitude to
Freikorps movement, 35, 36, 41–2, 45–6, 54–5, 75, 92, 96, 107–8, 269, 325, 485, 525; Oberland, 35–6, 64, 66
Freisler, Dr Roland, 531
Freundeskreis RFSS: *see* Himmler, Freundeskreis
Frick, Dr Wilhelm, 122, 135, 142, 145, 159, 182–4, 282, 357, 426
Friedeberg, Hanz v., 213, 216, 454, 603–5, 607
Fritsch, Werner v., 146, 155, 160, 211–19, 230, 244
Fromm, Bella, 121, 181, 194, 227, 229
Fromm, Friedrich, 491–2, 496, 505–7, 509, 511, 513–4, 531
Functionalists, 469–70
Funk, Walther, 218, 309, 318, 476–7

Gaevernitz: *see* Schulz-Gaevernitz
Galen, Clemens v., 476
Galton, Francis, 32–3
Gärtner, SS-Oberführer, 296, 298
gas chambers, 262, 276, 303–5, 334–5, 344–5, 355, 359, 371–3, 390–3, 396–9, 416–7, 482, 486, 527, 537, 545
gas vans, 305, 333, 335, 348, 357–8, 373
Gebhardt, Prof. Karl, 36, 174, 177, 187,

Hansen-Nootbar, Korv. Kapitän, 454, 513
Hartheim Castle, 304, 332, 371–2, 453
Hase, Paul v., 230, 492, 511–2, 529, 531
Hassell, Ulrich v., 243–5, 263, 275, 288, 325–7, 329, 335, 346, 383, 409, 420–1, 424–5, 427, 429, 479, 529
Haushofer, Albrecht, 286, 326–7, 329, 383, 545, 571, 589
Haushofer, Prof. Karl, 74, 286, 329, 589
Hausser, Paul, 494–5, 501
Hayler, Franz, 318, 476, 478
Heiden, Erhard, 86, 91
Heines, Edmund, 155, 157
Heinrich I, King, 249, 394
Heinrich, Prince, 21, 27, 29
Heinrici, Gotthard, 572, 574, 580
Heissmeyer, August, 201, 459, 535
Helfferich, Emil, 182, 500
Held, Heinrich, 126
Helldorf, Graf Wolf v., 152, 213–4, 218, 230, 237, 498, 505–6, 508, 530–1
Henderson, Nevile, 263–7
Henlein, Konrad, 225–6, 230, 234–5
Hermann, Michel, 372
Herrgesell, Gerhard, 529–3
Hess, Rudolf, 74–5, 111, 117, 119, 147, 152, 180, 202, 225, 273–4, 282, 286, 307–8, 326–7, 329–30, 337, 583
Hetzer, Prof. Hildegard, 365
Hewitt, Abram, 473–4
Heyde, Prof. Werner, 331
Heydrich, Bruno, 106, 380
Heydrich, Heinz, 106, 120, 123
Heydrich, Lina, 110, 112, 120, 126, 165, 198, 210, 233, 320, 360–1, 380, 562
Heydrich, Maria, 106
Heydrich, Reinhard, 11, 96, 105–13, 116, 118, 120, 122–6, 131–2, 135–9, 141, 143–7, 149–50, 153, 155–60, 171, 174, 185, 190, 196–201, 210–7, 219–20, 222–3, 229–32, 237–8, 240–4, 250, 253, 262–5, 268, 270–6, 278, 281–2, 285–6, 296, 302–7, 312–5, 318, 320, 323–4, 326, 329–32, 334–5, 339, 343–4, 346–9, 353–5, 357–62, 372–3, 378–82, 385–8, 400, 407, 412, 414, 420, 422–3, 425, 448, 470, 482, 552, 575, 604; *and see* Himmler, relationship with Heydrich
Hildebrandt, Richard, 139, 297, 459, 476
Himmler, Anna, 21, 23, 26–7, 30–1, 37, 43, 46, 62, 76–7, 141
Himmler, Ernst, 22, 43
Himmler, Prof. Gebhard, 16–8, 20–3, 25–6, 27, 31, 36–7, 38, 43, 46, 55, 59, 77, 88, 131, 141, 172, 245, 552
Himmler, Gebhard (Jnr.), 21–3, 29, 31, 39, 41, 43, 49, 51, 57, 59–63, 67, 83, 129, 141, 606
Himmler, Gudrun, 140, 326, 366, 401
Himmler, Heinrich, born, 21; boyhood and family, 5, 16, 21–9, 43–5, 55; attends Cathedral School, Munich (1906), 22; starts diary (1910), 23; attends Royal Wilhelm Gymnasium, Munich (1910), 23–5; longs to be army officer, 25, 27–9, 36, 38, 41–2; attends Gymnasium, Landshut (1913), 26; joins 11th Bavarian Infantry (1918), 29–30; political activity for BVP, 31; demobilised (1918) and returns to Gymnasium, Landshut (1919), 31; joins Freikorps Landshut (1919), 36; chooses agriculture as career (1919), 36–7; starts book list (1919), 38; attends Technical High School, Munich (1919), 39; initiated into Apollo Fraternity, 40; joins paramilitary units, Munich (1919), 42, 46, 52; called out in 'Kapp Putsch' (1920), 46; begins practical farm year (1920), 49–50; returns to Technical High School, Munich (1921), 51; family hit by inflation (1921), 55; resolves doubts on duelling, 44–6, 51, 56, 73; secures duel (1922), 56–7; attains diploma in agriculture (1922), 57; takes post as Assistent in fertiliser company (1922), 57; joins Röhm's paramilitary Reichsflagge and Nazi Party (1923), 59; involves himself in his brother's fiancée problem, 59–63; leaves fertiliser company (1923), 63; joins paramilitary Kompanie Werner (1923), 63; marches

of Warsaw ghetto (1943), 445–52, 457, 470; orders scorched earth policy in east, 462; publicly reveals Final Solution (1942), 385, (1943), 465, (1944), 484–5, 519; takes over production 'V' rocket parts (1943), 464–5, 482, 535; and 'Total War' (1943), 466, 477–8, 484, 536, 559; becomes chief of German intelligence (1944), 480, 535; barters Jews for trucks/foreign exchange (1944–5), 482–3, 545–6, 548–9; *and see* seeks contacts with West; and 20 July 1944 bomb plot, 480–1, 489–92, 496–502, 504–11, 514, 516, 527–33, 535, 538, 541, 571, 574, 586, 588–9; appointed C-in-C Replacement Army (1944), 509–10, 512, 516, 529, 535; seeks contacts with West (1944), 522, 529–30, 535, 543–6, (1945), 565–6, 570–1, 586, 590–2; *and see* peace negotiations; calls for fanatical resistance (1944–5), 517–22, 536–7, 540–4, 546, 555, 577, 580, 585; appointed to put down Warsaw uprising (1944), 524–7; appointed to command 'Volkssturm' (1944), 535, 539–43; the natural successor to Hitler, 536, 543, 554, 593, 595; appointed C-in-C Army Group Upper Rhine (1944), 546, 554–6; appointed C-in-C Army Group Vistula (1945), 559–60; 562–4; bargains over release of Jews/other prisoners, (1945), 565–7, 577–8, 580, 582, 585; and order for destruction of concentration camps, 567, 573, 582, 585, 590, 592; loses Hitler's confidence, 567, 569–72, 579, 587, 593; gives up command Army Group Vistula, 571–2; and peace negotiations with West, 572–6, 578–9, 582–3, 585–6, 591, 593–6, 603–4, 610; betrays Hitler, 594–7, 602–3; dismissed from all offices and sentenced to death by Hitler, 597–8, 600; asks to be Dönitz's deputy, 602; talks of suicide, 603; dismissed from all offices by Dönitz, 606, 608; made scapegoat for crimes of Third Reich, 605, 608; attempts escape from Allies, 606–9; arrested by British, 609–11; commits suicide, 611.

appearance, 10, 24, 26, 78, 80, 92, 105, 122, 137, 140, 165, 174, 223, 225, 233, 245, 247–8, 288, 297, 360, 377, 417, 540, 565, 610; manner, 80, 85, 100, 122, 137–9, 165, 194, 203–4, 223, 244, 247–8, 268, 288, 321–2, 360–1, 394, 396, 413, 420, 447–8, 466, 538, 565, 571–2, 581, 586, 593, 602, 604, 607, 610; physically awkward, 24–5, 28, 205, 245; poor health, 21–2, 28, 37–9, 40, 49, 245–6, 308, 312, 320, 323, 326–7, 329, 408–9, 457, 522, 537, 567, 569, 571, 586, 591; stomach pains, 14, 28, 138, 245–6, 269, 320, 327, 408, 522, 537, 567; unsatisfactory relationships with girls, 13–4, 28, 39–42, 46, 52, 169, 552; and sex, 14, 53, 73, 169, 185–9, 201, 280, 320, 390, 437, 441–2, 459, 485–6, 488, 534; and schizoid behaviour, 11–15, 25, 41, 139, 189–90, 269, 325, 473–5, 518, 565–6, 585–7, 607, 609; and sado-masochism, 15, 28, 128, 189–90, 239, 280, 325, 369, 376–7, 436–41, 485, 549–53, 586

character traits: prudish/prigishness, 6, 14, 41, 46, 52, 59–63, 71, 196, 202, 204, 394, 402, 471, 552; repression/self-discipline, 41, 46–9, 52–3, 60, 93, 100, 604; ruthlessness/hardness, 47–9, 62–3, 138, 182–4, 238–9, 267, 273–4, 288, 290, 301–2, 324–6, 333–4, 340, 343, 353, 367–70, 375, 379, 382, 384, 392, 399–400, 402, 415–6, 437, 445, 447–8, 451, 460–1, 469, 476, 484–6, 488, 524–5, 528, 539, 541–3, 551, 553, 559–62, 580–1, 585, 587–9; obsession with detail, 13, 29, 38, 196, 457, 556, 586; compulsive organiser, 'Der Heini macht es schon', 31, 51, 59, 92, 138, 194, 196, 201, 400–1; as politician, 135–6, 139, 142, 144, 148–9, 152, 161–2, 184, 194, 253, 271, 298, 416, 420, 427, 448, 480, 501, 516–7, 535,

206–8; seizes power (the Machtergreifung) (1933), 121–2; and the Reichstag fire (1933), 123–4; and Stennes revolt, 99–100, 150, 212; and purge of Röhm's SA (1934), 142–59, 206, 212, 217, 510, 569; takes over as C-in-C armed forces (1934), 160, 211–7; and the road to war, 206–9, 211–2, 227, 235–7, 251–3, 257–67; takes over Austria (1938), 220–1; takes over Czechoslovakia (1938–9), 226, 229–37, 240, 245, 250–1; attacks Poland (1939), 251–3, 257–67, 269, 271; euthanasia programme (1939), 260–2; and Burgerbräukeller bomb plot (1939), 282–6; attacks Norway/Denmark (1940), 296–8; attacks France (1940), 284–6, 296, 299–300; attacks Russia (1941), 314–6, 323, 327–30, 335, 337–8; declares war on USA (1941), 356; conducts Eastern campaign, 368, 381, 389, 400, 406–8, 412–4, 462, 483, 523–4, 557, 566, 569–70; and allied invasion Europe (1944), 489, 493–4; and scorched earth policy, 543, 567, 569–70; and attacks through Ardennes (1944), 553–8; establishes HQ in Berlin (1944), 558; and in bunker, Berlin (1945), 569, 584–7, 592; loses faith in Himmler, 567, 569–72, 577, 579, 587, 593; and 'Alpine redoubt', 573, 575, 583; decision to die in Berlin, 584–5, 593, 595; and battle for Berlin, 592–3, 595, 597, 599, 604; admits war lost, 592–3; betrayed by Himmler, 596–7, 602–3, orders Himmler's execution and dismisses him from offices, 597–8, 600; marries, 597–8; appoints Dönitz as successor, 598, 601; suicide, 599
appearance, 66, 69, 150, 233, 368, 377, 483, 558, 587–8; health and drugs, 246, 407–10, 418, 464, 474, 483, 510, 558, 560, 567, 569, 580–1; as orator, 55, 68, 70, 75, 82, 312–3; popularity, 104, 110, 125, 217, 236, 285, 314, 336, 338, 411, 569; security and assassination attempts, 180–1, 481, 282–6, (20 July 1944) 230, 232, 489, 491, 495–6, 498, 502–4, 505, 507–9, 511–6, 531–2, 588
attitudes: Social-Darwinism, 91, 97, 171, 259, 463, 564, 569–70; towards Final Solution of Jewish question, 228, 240, 250, 259–60, 272–3, 305–6, 315, 320, 323–4, 332–4, 349–50, 353, 357, 359, 362, 373, 381, 408, 417–8, 444, 470, 484: *and see* euthanasia programme
relationships: with Dönitz, 414, 558–9, 579, 588; with Himmler, 87, 92, 102, 105, 132–3, 135, 137–8, 142, 153–62, 164, 181, 184, 186, 212, 221, 231, 235, 240, 244–7, 277, 298, 301, 308, 313, 316, 319, 346, 349, 356, 389, 409, 412–3, 418, 425–7, 448, 461, 465, 468, 474, 477, 480, 483–4, 509–10, 512, 517–8, 524, 535–7, 539, 543, 545–7, 553–4, 559, 561, 566, 579, 588, 593, *and see* 'loses faith in' and 'betrayed by' Himmler above
Hoepner, Erich, 505, 507, 509, 529, 531
Hofacker, Dr Caesar v., 494, 497, 529
Höfle, Friedl and Hugo, 62–3
Höfle, Hermann, 538
Holzlöhner, Prof. E, 437, 439
Höss, Rudolf, 129–30, 182–3, 247, 267–8, 310, 321–2, 333–5, 345, 373, 389–96, 398, 482–3, 486, 545, 547–9, 551, 553, 606
Hossbach memorandum, 206, 211–2, 230
Huber, Kurt, 428–9
Hugenberg, Alfred, 95, 102, 115, 119, 122, 125, 147

Ibsen, Henrik, 47–9, 71
Inquisition, Spanish, 7–9, 131
Intentionalists, 469–70

Japan: geopolitical, 258, 315, 336, 409, 498, 544; Three Power Pact, 315, 336–7; Russia-Neutrality Pact, 336; attacks US and GB, 356
Jeckeln, Friedrich, 353–5
Jessen, Prof. Jens, 420, 427, 530

Ludecke, Kurt, 82–3, 86–8
Ludendorff, Erich, 65–6, 73, 79

Macher, Heinz, 600–2, 608–9
Machtergreifung, *see* Nazi Party
Majdanek, 417, 537
Maly Trostenets, 373, 417
Manstein, Erich v., 348, 415, 531
Marinotti, Franco, 543–5
Masur, Norbert, 585, 590, 592
Mauthausen, 195, 222, 225, 304, 388, 434–6, 470, 551–2, 577
Medical experiments: *see* Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Dachau, Ravensbrück, Sachsenhausen; *and see* Brack, Clauberg, Dering, Finke, Hippke, Holzlöhner, Mengele, Rascher, Schilling, Schumann, Weltz
Mein Kampf, 74–5, 151, 208, 258–9, 306, 329
Meissner, Otto, 118, 120–1
Mengele, Dr Josef, 440
Mennecke, Friedrich, 331
Meyer, Prof. Konrad, 363
Milch, Erhard, 294, 375, 436, 439, 465–6, 469
Molotov, Vyacheslav, 260, 263, 315, 572
Montgomery, Bernard, 407, 568, 575, 600, 603–5, 607, 610
Moltke, Helmuth v., 346, 428, 497, 529
Morgenthau plan, 536–7
Morell, Dr Theodor, 246, 409–11, 464
Müller, Heinrich 'Gestapo', 127, 144–5, 147, 213, 240, 273, 334, 341, 379, 413, 422–3, 427–8, 480, 500, 505–8, 511, 530–2, 588, 596
Müller, Josef, 423
Murphy, Michael, 610–12
Mussolini, Benito, 212, 220, 236, 265, 307, 314, 327, 404, 419, 424, 470–1, 475, 502, 508–10, 513, 515

Nacht und Nebel, 430–1
Natzweiler, 311
Naujocks, Alfred, 265, 282–3
Naumann, Werner, 492
Nazi Party, National-Socialist German Workers' Party: beginnings, 35, 54, 58–9, 64, 69, 84–5, 87–8, 92, 109–10, 125, 414, 536; proselytising, 6, 55, 71–3, 80–1, 84–5, 95–6, 536; banned (1923), 67, 75; ban lifted (1924), 81–2; rallies, 42, 137, 172, 232–4, 258–9; road to power, 96, 98, 115–21; *Machterfreifung* (seisure of power), 96, 98, 111–3, 119–22, 138, 221, 228, 260; *Weltanschauung* (global philosophy), 18-9, 276-7, 307, 336, 377, 470, 483–5, 546–7, 552–3, 570; *and see Mein Kampf*
Nebe, Arthur, 113, 141, 162, 194, 210, 213–6, 218, 230, 262, 276, 283, 303, 306, 339, 342, 354, 379, 413, 498–500, 505–6, 508, 530–1
Neuengamme, 311, 553, 585, 591, 594
Neurath, Constantin v., 122, 211, 218, 226, 346–7, 426, 531
Nietzsche, Friedrich, 32–5, 48, 69, 71, 91, 363, 368

Oberg, Karl, 445, 573
Oertzen, Hans, 497
Ohlendorf, Otto, 318, 339, 347, 413, 419–20, 422, 425, 465, 474, 476, 478, 480–1, 488–90, 499–500, 505–6, 516, 538, 547, 553, 561, 564, 595, 606–8
Olbricht, Friedrich, 479, 492, 496–8, 505, 507, 513, 529
opposition movement: *see* Himmler, and Opposition
Osten, Lina v.: *see* Heydrich, Lina
Oster, Hans, 210, 214, 216–8, 230–2, 234–6, 286, 296, 299, 328, 421–3, 479, 489, 498–9, 529–30, 588
Oxford Group: *see* Buchman

Papen, Franz v., 116–7, 119–20, 122, 142, 147–8, 153–4, 158, 220
Parrilli, Luigi, 572, 579
Patchowsky, Günther, 141, 155
Patton, George, 576
Payne-Best, Sigismund, 281–2
Peiper, Joachim, 555
Pétain, Henri, 308

50, 74, 235, 251, 257–8, 308, 313–5, 329, 336–7, 474, 518, 526, 560, 563, 574–5, 603; *and see* Stalin and Czechoslovakia, German take-over

SA, 58–9, 65–7, 69, 75–6, 85–6, 89–90, 96, 99–101, 105, 109, 112–3, 115–7, 121–2, 124, 126, 129, 132, 135, 209, 240, 569; 'Putsch' and Röhm purge, 141–63
Sachsenhausen, 182–3, 232, 267, 286, 311, 331, 461
Salomon, Pfeffer v., 89–90, 99
Sammern-Frankenegg, Dr, 444, 446
Sander, Col., 503–5
Sauckel, Fritz, 405
Saur, Karl, 464
Schacht, Hjalmar, 115, 147–8, 151–3, 201, 206–7, 214–5, 218, 227, 230, 232, 244, 264, 531, 589
Schellenberg, Walter, 268, 270, 273, 281–3, 300, 326, 329, 350, 360–1, 366, 379, 383, 412–13, 422–3, 425, 427, 474, 480, 482, 489–90, 493, 497, 499–501, 505–6, 508, 510, 518, 530, 538, 546–7, 549, 563–4, 566, 574–6, 578–82, 584–5, 590–6, 603–4
Schilling, Prof. Klaus, 374
Schirach, Baldur v., 473, 577
Schleicher, Kurt v., 116–7, 120, 147–8, 150, 152, 158, 160, 212
Schmauser, SS-Obergruf., 321–2, 389
Schneidhuber, August, 131, 157, 162
Scholl, Hans and Sophie, 428–9, 489
Schopenhauer, Arthur, 32, 49
Schörner, Ferdinand, 559, 563, 598
Schreck, Julius, 86
Schröder, Kurt v., 115–7, 119–20, 148–9, 207, 481
Schulenburg, Graf Fritz v.d., 230, 497–8, 500, 529
Schulenburg, Graf Werner v.d., 260, 263, 337
Schulz, Prof., 363, 476
Schulz-Gaevernitz, Gero v., 573, 584
Schumann, Dr Horst, 439–40
Schuschnigg, Kurt v., 220–1, 235
Schutzhaft, Protective Custody, 124–5, 128, 130, 132, 138, 145, 147, 195, 199, 221, 223, 242–3, 249–50, 310, 529, 532
Schwanenfeld, Graf Ulrich v., 489, 497, 529
SD: *see* SS
Seeckt, Hans v., 64–5
Seisser, Hans v., 65, 73
Selvester, Tom, 609–10
Seyss-Inquart, Dr Arthur, 220–1, 430, 573
Siemens, Carl, 149
Siemens & Halske, 119, 486, 552
Sievers, Wolfram, 437–8, 533
Sippenhaft, 460, 528–9, 577–8, 589
Skorzeny, Otto, 471, 513
Sobibor, 372–3, 397, 416–7, 453
Social-Darwinism, *see* Darwin *and* Hitler, Attitudes
Sollmann, Max, 367–8, 387, 477, 488
Sonderegger, Franz, 422–3
SPD, Social Democratic Party, 81, 532
Speer, Albert, 298, 310, 347, 362, 405, 415–6, 418–9, 433, 441, 464–5, 468–70, 473, 476–8, 482–4, 486–7, 518, 535, 537, 552, 558, 569–70, 579, 587, 595, 601, 603–5
SS, Schutzstaffel: General, 9, 85–7, 89, 96, 100–5, 112–3, 115–7, 121–2, 124, 129, 132–6, 138–9, 152, 154–5, 158–60, 164, 166–70, 172–9, 189–95, 197, 202, 204, 209, 212, 214, 218–9, 222, 224–5, 232, 239–40, 247–8, 252, 260, 265–7, 271, 275, 278–81, 284–5, 296–8, 300, 303–4, 310, 316–7, 326–7, 335, 340–1, 346, 348, 350–2, 354, 359, 362, 367–8, 382–4, 387–9, 397, 411, 415, 421, 431, 433–4, 444–5, 477–8, 481, 499, 501–2, 505–7, 510, 514, 520, 524–5, 531, 544, 550, 552–3, 555–6, 561–2, 565–6, 569, 571–2, 581, 587, 597, 600, 604, 610; role, 91, 99, 100–1, 105, 116, 149–50, 155, 161, 164, 176–9, 224, 247, 260, 267, 571, 592–3; uniform, 86, 89, 137, 180 220; Knightly Order, 139, 164, 170–1, 180, 188, 193–4, 207, 248, 361,

Strasser, Gregor, 75–7, 79–81, 83–5, 87–8, 96–7, 102, 116–7, 120, 144, 147–8, 154, 158–60, 163, 212, 232, 383, 448, 586
Strasser, Otto, 55, 80, 83, 87–8, 90, 94–7, 99, 101, 135, 148, 152, 154, 158, 283, 285–6
Strauch, Dr, 342
Streckenbach, Bruno, 135
Stroop, Joseph/Jürgen, 104–5, 111, 117–8, 137, 166, 174, 180, 189, 230, 232–3, 247, 332, 347, 361, 446–53, 495, 501–2, 533, 542, 581–2, 584–5, 608
Strünck, Theodor, 498
Stülpnagel, Karl v., 285, 494, 506, 513, 531
Stülpnagel, Otto v., 430
Suchomel, Franz, 453
Superman myth, 32–3, 97

T 4: *see* euthanasia programme
Taubert, SS-Gruf, 248–9, 477
Terboven, Josef, 97, 156, 604
Theresienstadt, 387–8, 404, 582
Thewelweit, Klaus, 41–2, 46, 325
Thiele, Walther, 504–5, 508
Thierack, Dr Otto, 552, 608
Thomas, Georg, 209, 217, 285, 346
Thule Society, 35–6, 54, 64, 70, 96, 107, 119
Thyssen, Fritz, 94, 97, 115, 147–8, 151, 208
Todt, Fritz, 227, 298
Totenkopf: *see* SS, Totenkopfverbände, Totenkopfdivision
Trawniki, 372, 398, 417, 447
Treblinka, 334, 396–9, 416–7, 436, 445, 449–50, 452
Tresckow, Henning v., 421, 497, 529
Trott zu Solz, Adam v., 497, 499

Untermensch, 6, 14, 177, 300, 311, 348, 353, 382, 439–40, 445, 450, 485, 538, 551–2
USA: historical, 18, 31, 34; capitalism, 97, 99, 114–5, 119, 147–8, 150–1, 206–8, 211; geopolitical, 258, 306, 308, 313–5, 326, 329–30, 336, 383, 409, 463, 473–4, 498, 518–9, 522, 526, 536, 544, 563, 574–5

Vansittart, Sir Robert, 209, 230–1, 244, 257
Verfügungstruppe, *see* SS
Versailles Treaty (1919), 44, 71, 94, 96, 108, 110, 119, 151, 162, 217, 263, 490, 521
Vietinghoff, Heinrich v., 573–4
Vlassov, Andrei, 442, 466–7, 538
Völkisch movement, 36, 38, 47, 55, 70–1, 75–9, 81, 107; *and see* Himmler, Attitudes
Völkischer Beobachter, 35, 67, 72, 88
Volksgrenadier divisions, 519–21, 528, 536, 554
Volkssturm, 535–6, 539–43, 553–4, 562, 587, 597, 600

Wäckerle, Hilmar, 128, 132
Waffen-SS, *see* SS
Wagner, Adolf, 126, 128, 131–2, 157
Wagner, Eduard, 444
Wagner, Dr Gerhard, 201
Waldeck u. Pyrmont, Erbprinz zu, 102, 113
Wallenberg, Jacob and Marcus, 490, 545
Wannsee Conference, 357–9, 552
Warsaw: ghetto, 371, 396–7; destruction of (1943), 443–52, 457, 470, 582; uprising, 523–7, 538, 541
Wartenburg, Yorck v., 497, 529, 531
Weizsäcker, Baron Ernst v., 236, 264
Weltz, Prof. G, 375
Wenk, Walther, 566
Werwolf organization, 542, 554, 580–1 585, 606–8
Wetzel, Dr Erhard, 348–9, 388
Wewelsburg, 139, 171, 248–9, 324, 477
White Rose Society, 428–9, 489
Widmann, Dr Albert, 262, 276, 303, 306
Wilson, Sir Horace, 231–2, 234–5

Windsor, Duke of, 308–9, 313, 326
Winterbotham, Frederick, 150–1, 161, 180, 266
Wirth, Christian, 276, 303–4, 306, 332, 371–2, 397–8, 453
Witch trials, 5–6, 8, 72
Wittelsbach dynasty, 21–2, 26, 29–30, 54, 64–6
Witzleben, Erwin v., 230, 232, 507, 509, 531–2, 538
Wolff, Frieda, 165, 175, 202, 233, 247, 319
Wolff, Karl, 11, 111, 136–7, 139–40, 144, 149, 152, 156–7, 160, 164–5, 166, 170–1, 174–6, 185, 190, 193, 202, 205, 213, 218, 220–2, 233–4, 240, 245, 247, 251–2, 259, 263, 268, 270, 274, 285, 287–8, 290, 295, 297–8, 300, 312, 319–21, 324, 339, 342–3, 347, 352, 360–1, 376–7, 385, 389, 395, 424–7, 436, 463, 466, 475, 509–10, 543, 546, 556, 572–8, 582–5
Wolff, Karl-Heinz, Thorisman, 175–6, 556
Wolff, Widukind, 247
Woyrsch, Udo v., 155, 159–60, 203, 275
Wüst, Walther, 477, 533
WVHA, Economics and Administration Main Office, *see* SS WVHA

Young Plan, 95

Zabecki, Franciszek, 397, 399
Zahler, Ludwig, 30, 39, 49–50, 52, 54, 57, 77
Zeitzler, Karl, 409, 412
Zhukov, Grigori, 557–60, 566–7, 583, 587, 592, 599
Zipperer, Falk, 26–7, 29, 39, 77–8

383, 425, *and see* Wewelsburg; standards of entry, 101, 103, 167–8, 178, 197, 278, 310, 384, 415, 442–3, 476; Race Office, 101–3, 115; Race and Settlement Main Office, RuSHA, 166, 172, 250, 271, 280–1, 307, 347, 363–7, 459–60, 476, 535; Intelligence duties, 89–90, 105, 111, 145, 147; Security Service, SD, 112–3, 116, 121, 123, 126, 138, 145–6, 148, 155, 179, 196–201, 212, 219–20, 222, 229–30, 232, 240–3, 247, 250, 264, 268, 270–2, 284, 309, 318, 339, 346–7, 351, 354, 360, 371, 409, 416, 420, 423, 425, 429, 431–2, 481, 507, 510, 513, 533, 576, 600, 603–4; guard duties, 111, 178, 180–1; Reich Security Service, RSD, 180–1, 587; Security Police, 'Sipo', 185, 197, 378, 459, 533; Reich Security Main Office, RSHA, 271–3, 306, 310–2, 334, 347, 349, 361, 363, 365, 400, 405, 412, 416–7, 420, 433, 444, 450, 476, 478, 480–1, 486, 499, 508, 511, 575; concentration camp guards, 129–30; 134–5, 157; Totenkopfverbände, 182–4, 191, 195, 218–9, 224–5, 243, 264, 271–2, 278, 281, 299–300, 310, 316, 340–1, 358, 397–8; *and see* Totenkopfdivision; foreign auxiliaries, 340–1, 346, 354, 372, 397–8, 447, 452–3, 524–6; Verfügungstruppe, 161, 195, 218–9, 220, 224–5, 241, 250, 252–3, 264, 266, 278, 296–300, 311, 494; Waffen-SS, 224, 279, 311, 313, 316–7, 326, 339–40, 346, 355–6, 359, 362, 368–71, 379, 381–2, 384, 393–4, 402, 414–5, 438, 442–3, 447, 454, 456, 459, 462, 471–2, 475, 495, 501, 506–7, 518, 520, 524–5, 531, 535, 538–9, 543, 551, 553, 555, 560, 568, 575, 577, 579, 592–3, 597, 600, 604, 606
Regiments and Divisions; Das Reich, 328–9, 340, 356, 368, 414–5, 454, 462, 475, 555–6, 563, 577, 600; Der Führer, 225, 299, 313; Deutschland, 198, 252, 266, 313; Frundsberg, 415; Galizische, 539; 13th Gebirgs, 443; Germania, 266; Hitler Jugend, 415, 555; Hohenstaufen, 415, 555, 577; Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler, LAH, 156–7, 159, 180, 232, 266, 278, 288, 299–300, 311, 313, 328, 340, 355–6, 414–5, 454, 462, 495, 506–7, 555, 577; Maria Theresa, 524; Nordland, 298, 415; Ostmark, 225; Prinz Eugen, 371; Reichsführer SS, 415; 'Rona', *see* 'Kaminsky', Totenkopf, 369–70, 414–5, 454, 462, 523, 560, 563, 577; Westland, 301; Wiking, 340, 523, 560; mass atrocities, 300, 340, 431, 525–7, 555–6, 563.
Recruiting Office, Ergänzungsamt, 224, 250, 279, 371; Führungs, Head Office, 311, 316; economic enterprises, 195–6, 222, 298, 310–11, 321, 359–60, 362, 378, 396, 432–3, 441, 464–5, 468, 481, 486–7, 547; economics and Administration Main Office, WVHA, 311–12, 321, 359, 361, 393, 405, 453–6, 464, 478, 486; extortion, 112, 115, 118; corruption, 140, 193–4, 310–2, 323, 371, 393, 396, 443–4, 452–3, 470
Stahlecker, Franz, 339, 354
Stalin, Josef, 18, 125, 200, 257–8, 260, 263, 271, 308, 314–5, 328, 330, 336–8, 340, 359, 409, 463, 523, 526, 538, 544, 560, 563, 574–6, 583, 595, 599
Stangl, Franz, 304, 372, 452–3
Stauffenberg, Graf Berthold v., 479, 497–8, 529
Stauffenberg, Graf Klaus v., 479, 490–2, 494, 496–8, 500–3, 505–9, 513, 528–9
Stauss, Emil v., 119
Steiner, Felix, 252, 266, 313, 592
Stennes, Walter, 99–100, 150, 212
sterilisation experiments: *see* Medical experiments
sterilisation laws, 167, 201, 260, 263, 304–6
Stickstoff-Land GmbH, 57–8, 63
Stieff, Helmuth, 492, 496, 502, 531
Stölzle, Paula, 59–63
Stosstrupp Hitler, 65–6, 86, 90

Poehner, Ernst, 54, 73
Pohl, Oswald, 311, 321, 360–2, 368, 389, 432–3, 441, 453, 456, 464, 478, 481, 486, 547
Poland: *see* Hitler, attacks Poland, *and* Himmler, policy for Poland, policy for occupied east, *and* Warsaw, *and* Extermination camps
Popitz, Dr Johannes, 244–5, 424, 426–7, 474, 479, 530, 545
Potthast, Hedwig ('Häschen'), 184, 233–4, 320, 366, 424, 488, 514, 539, 576, 608
Prützmann, Hans, 462, 542, 554, 606, 608, 610–11

Quirnheim, Mertz v., 497–8, 507, 513, 528–9

race hygiene (eugenics), 32–4, 81, 104, 167, 177–8, 228–9, 260, 262, 270, 301–7, 353, 363–7, 374, 386, 388, 439–40, 456, 475–6, 521, 584, 598; *and see* Himmler, Attitude towards Jews, Aryan racial purity of blood; *and see* Jews, Final Solution
racial breeding, 33–4, 90, 101, 103–5, 166–9, 179, 192, 201, 260, 440; *and see* Mengele, *and* Himmler, Attitude, Argan racial purity
Raeder, Eric, 110, 146–51, 211, 214, 226–7, 252, 267, 296, 309, 412
Rasch, Otto, 339, 347, 354
Rasche, Dr Karl, 207, 219, 222, 422, 491
Rascher, 'Nini', 234, 374–7, 589
Rascher, Dr Sigmund, 234, 374–7, 401, 436–9, 589
Rath, Ernst v., 237–8, 240–1
Rathenau, Walther, 55–6, 108
Rauschmayer, Mariele, 66–7, 76–7, 78–9
Ravensbrück, 333, 387, 437, 547, 590–2
Reichenau, Walther v., 120, 151, 154–6, 158, 160–1, 215, 266, 348
Reichleitner, Franz, 304, 416–7, 453
Reichsbanner, 89, 124
Reichsflagge, Reichskriegsflagge, 59, 64–7, 126
Reichskristallnacht (pogrom), 237–45
Reichstag fire, 123–4, 138, 153
Reinefarth, Heinz, 524–5, 527, 562
Reinhard, Operation, 276, 344, 347; *and see* Extermination camps, *and* Himmler, Final Solution
Reitsch, Hanna, 320, 596–7, 600–2
Remer, Otto, 511–2, 514
Ribbentrop, Joachim v., 151, 202, 218, 226, 237, 245–6, 263–6, 268, 286, 306, 309, 313–5, 326, 350–1, 356–7, 409, 419, 427, 446, 480, 509, 515, 518, 537, 546, 564–6, 573, 587, 604
RKF, Office of the Reichskommissar for the Consolidation of German Nationhood: *see* Himmler, appointed Commissar for the Consolidation of German Nationhood
Robespierre, Maximilien, 3–4, 49, 231
rockets, V 1 and V 2, 464–5, 482–3, 487, 493, 499, 518, 535, 537, 552, 554–5
Rodionov, ex-Major Red Army, 442–3, 467
Roeder, Manfred, 423–4
Röhm, Ernst, 52, 54–5, 59, 64–7, 69, 72–3, 76, 81, 85–6, 88, 96, 100, 105, 109, 113, 115–7, 120, 126, 131–2, 135, 141–60, 164, 206, 212, 232, 383, 448, 510, 569, 586
Rokossovskii, K., 537, 557, 559, 566
Romberg, Dr, 375–7, 401
Rommel, Erwin, 328, 349, 400, 407, 464, 483, 443–5, 497–8, 501, 533
Roosevelt, Franklin, 258, 306, 308, 328, 337, 349, 356, 359, 421, 473, 489, 536–7, 544–5, 563, 573–5, 579
Rosenberg, Alfred, 70, 171, 179, 202, 282, 323, 326, 344, 347–8, 352–3, 357, 362–3, 388, 400, 608
Rothschild, Louis v., 222, 422
RSD: *see* SS, RSD
Rundstedt, Gerd v., 493–4, 517, 528, 531, 533, 559–60, 573
Ruff, Dr, 375, 401
RuSHA, *see* SS, RuSHA
Russia: historical, 18, 32; geopolitical,

Jesuits, *see* Himmler, attitude to
Jews: historic persecution, 6–9, 14; position in Germany, 6, 36, 38; anti-Semitism in Germany (1920s), 54–6, 68, 70, 72, 96, 106–7, 119; Nazi persecution of (1930s), 112, 127, 130, 132, 145, 159, 194, 196, 199, 204, 208, 221, 227–9, 237–44, 276–7, 281, 286, 318, 331–2, 443–52, 470; executions of in east, 270, 274, 276, 278, 290, 303–5, 324–5, 331, 341–3, 345–6, 349, 354–5, 362, 371–3, 378; Final Solution (*Endlösung*), 228, 240, 270, 272–3, 276, 302–7, 315, 331–5, 341, 343–4, 347–9, 352–3, 357–8, 381, 385–6, 388, 390–3, 396–9, 416–8, 444, 468–70, 475, 482, 484–6, 519, 527, 537, 545–8, 551–2, 572, 584; *and see* Hitler, attitude towards Final Solution; Hungarian, 482–3, 545, 548, 553
Jodl, Alfred, 236, 509, 514–5, 559–60, 586, 588, 592, 604–5, 607–8

Kahr, Gustav v., 65, 73
Kaltenbrunner, Ernst, 220–1, 412–13, 417, 425, 455, 458, 476, 480, 486, 500, 504–6, 509, 513–4, 529–31, 554, 559, 564–6, 573, 575–6, 580–3, 585, 588, 592
Kaminsky, SS-Oberführer, 442–3, 524–5, 527
Kammler, Heinz, 389, 464, 481–2
Kampfbund, 64–7
Kapp, Wolfgang, 45, 108, 110
Kappler, Herbert, 475
Keitel, Wilhelm, 213–4, 216–7, 226, 251–2, 264–5, 268, 274, 314, 316, 346, 424, 480–1, 493–4, 496, 502–4, 507–9, 513–4, 531, 537, 540, 559, 586, 588, 592, 599, 604, 608
Keppler, Wilhelm, 115, 117, 119, 148–50, 206–8, 218–20, 500
Kernburger, Frau, 10–11, 15
Kersten, Felix, 245–6, 269, 308, 316–21, 323–7, 351–3, 360, 366–7, 389, 394, 396, 400–2, 408–11, 420, 425, 457, 465, 473–4, 482, 502, 510, 516, 522, 537–9, 544, 546–7, 549, 555, 563–4, 567, 571, 576, 580, 582, 585, 590–1, 605
Kesselring, Albert, 573–4, 576
Kierkegaard, Sören, 48–9
Kirdorf, Emil, 94, 97, 156, 604
Klausing, Friedrich, 496, 529
Kluge, Günther v., 494–5, 497–8, 501, 506, 510, 513–4, 531, 533, 581
Kobelinski, Hans v., 120, 123, 126, 138
Koch, Erich, 82, 539–40, 543
Koniev, Ivan, 557–60, 583, 587
Korherr, Dr Richard, 416–8
KPD, Communist Party, 81, 89, 116, 123–5, 131, 145, 147, 532
Kranefuss, Fritz, 149, 207, 500
Krebs, Albert, 85, 93
Krebs, Hans, 587, 592, 598–600
Krosigk, Schwerin v., 122, 491, 571, 585, 595, 604–5, 607
Krüger, Friedrich-Wilhelm, 306, 396, 399, 444–8, 450–2
Krupp, Gustav v., 156, 552
Kube, Wilhelm, 141, 341–2
Kulmhof, *see* Chelmno

Lammerding, Heinz, 563
Lammers, Dr Hans, 268, 307, 357, 371
Langbehn, Carl, 326–7, 379, 383, 409, 421, 424, 426–7, 474, 490, 530, 545
Lange, Dr Rudolf, 305, 354, 357–9
Lebensborn, 166–7, 202, 280, 365, 367–8, 387, 401, 454, 477, 488, 562
Lebensunwertes Lebens, *see* euthanasia programme
Leibbrandt, Dr, 353
Lemnitzer, Gen., 573, 577, 579
Ley, Robert, 131, 176
Lichtenburg, 195
Lindemann, Karl, 182
Lohse, Hinrich, 348–9, 353
Loritz, Frau, 39, 43, 49, 52
Loritz, Kaethe, 39, 50
Loritz, Maja, 39–40, 43
Lossow, Otto v., 64–5, 73
Lubbe, Marinus v.d., 124
Lüdde-Neurath, Walther, 595, 601–2

570–1, 587; idealism, 13, 37–9, 67, 78, 80, 82, 134, 138, 166–79, 194, 298, 457; *and see* 'volkisch', 'back to the soil' and 'Aryan/blood' attitudes below; idealisation of women, 13, 37, 39, 41–2, 46, 47, 79, 318–9, 394, 485; loyalty, 99–100, 116, 126, 137, 149–50, 152, 162, 164, 179, 247, 267, 379, 411, 425, 427, 448, 474, 481, 501, 510–11, 535–6, 565, 571, 578, 581–2, 586–7, 593–7, 602–3; incorruptibility, 140, 366, 469, 518; talkativeness, 13, 51, 394; as orator, 71–2, 80, 84, 100–1, 174, 294, 466, 521; conformism, 25, 179, 432, 484, 536, 552; compassion, 10–11, 15, 82, 394–5, (for animals) 351–2; dissatisfaction with himself, 13, 39–40, 46–7, 49, 51; fantasies of martyrdom, 40, 49–50, 403; pessimism, 39–41, 49–50, 51, 72, 78, (1945) 592, 603; vaccilation, 268–9, 411, 425, 427, 448, 474, 491, 546–7, 564, 566–7, 571–2, 578, 580, 583, 585, 605
attitudes: religious, 3, 23, 43–4, 68, 73, 80, 92, 174–6, 192, 203, 249, 386, 401–3, 484, 522, 538, 571, 611; to Eastern thought, 90–2, 364, 401–3, 522; *völkisch*, 38, 47, 67–8, 73, 77, 80, 85, 90–1, 101, 269, 386–7, 389, 401, 403, 472, 520–1, 533–4, 542, 552; back to the soil, 37–8, 42, 47, 68, 85, 90–1, 101–2, 164, 248, 297, 316–7, 321, 389, 477, 538; Aryan racial purity of blood, 4, 68, 81, 83, 90, 92–3, 101, 103–5, 111, 137, 166–70, 173, 179, 192, 224–5, 239, 245, 247, 259, 264, 279–80, 289–90, 291–8, 301–7, 311, 318–9, 344, 373–7, 382–7, 401–3, 457–60, 467, 475–6, 484, 520, 534, 542, 584; towards Jews, (1919) 38, 44, (1920) 46–7, (1921) 53–6, (1922) 55, 68, (1923), 70, (1924 and fully formed) 72, 80, 83, 85, 88, 90–1, 93, 104, 112, 127, 132, 145, 162–3, 164, 168, 176–7, 188–91, 198–200, 203, 223–4, 238-9, 264, 272, 292, 302–7, 324–5, 331–5, 353, 401, 409, 444, 455–6, 475–6, 541, 545, 551–2, 590; towards the Church/Jesuits, 3, 23, 43–4, 47, 67–8, 70, 80, 83, 88, 112, 132, 145, 162, 167–8, 170, 172, 176–7, 188–91, 198–200, 224, 238, 386, 399, 467, 538 571; towards Freemasons, 43–4, 47, 67–8, 70–1, 83, 88, 90, 112, 162, 164, 176–7, 198–200, 224, 238, 467, 541; towards Bolshevism, 36, 47, 68, 70–1, 90, 101, 127, 145, 164, 176–7, 188–9, 196, 198, 223, 238, 382–3, 401 409, 467, 474, 528, 540–1, 543–4, 546 578–9, 594; towards homosexuals, 71 152, 185–91, 196, 201, 367
relationships: with Dönitz, 454, 502, 595–6, 600–3; with Heydrich, 360–2, 378–81, 400; with Hitler, 68, 70, 75, 87–8, 92, 99–100, 102, 105, 116–7, 137 149, 164, 173, 177–9, 221, 231, 235, 244–7, 264, 277, 289–90, 301–7, 314, 316, 327, 350–1, 360, 369, 379, 385, 387, 389, 403, 408, 411–3, 416, 424–7 441, 449, 461–2, 464–5, 471–4, 477–8 483–4, 509, 517–21, 524–6, 535, 537, 540, 542, 545–7, 553, 555–6, 559–61, 563–7, 571–2, 578, 582–3, 585–8, 590 593–4, 605; and betrayal of Hitler, 594–7, 602–3
support from industrialists and Freundeskreis RFSS, 115–7, 119, 137 148–9, 171, 179, 182, 193–4, 207, 210 219, 233, 422, 476, 478, 481, 490, 500 552, 556, 564, 584
Himmler, Konrad, 20, 23
Himmler, 'Marga', 83–4, 93, 140, 165, 181, 233–4
Hindenburg, Oskar v., 118, 120–1
Hindenburg, Paul v., 117–8, 120–1, 124 146, 154, 160
Hippke, Prof., 436, 439
Hitler, Adolf, joins German Workers' Party, 35; leader of Kampfbund, 64 and Burgerbräukeller Putsch (1923), 65–7; tried and fortress detention, 73–5; released (1924), 81; refounds Nazi Party, 82, 87–8; industrial backing, 94–5, 97–9, 113–7, 119–20, 131,

with Röhm in Burgerbraukeller Putsch (1923), 65–7; unemployed (1923–4), 67; makes speaking tours for Nazi Party, 71–3, 80–1, 84–5; takes post as secretary to Gregor Strasser (1924), 76, 80; breaks with Church (1924), 80; appointed Deputy Gauleiter Nazi Party, Lower Bavaria (1924), 82; appointed Deputy Propaganda Leader and moves to Nazi Party HQ, Munich (1926), 83–4; appointed Deputy Reichsführer-SS (1927), 85–6, 92–3, 89–90; marries (1928), 83; daughter, Gudrun, born (1929), 93; and family life, 84, 93, 140,165, 181, 233–4, 248, 320, 366, 401, 539, 556, 591; appointed Reichsfuhrer-SS (1929), 92–3; builds SS security and intelligence organisation loyal to Hitler, 89–90, 99, 100, 105; engages Heydrich as Intelligence chief (1931), 111–3; expands SS, 115; and Machtergreifung (1933), 120–1; appointed Police President, Bavaria (1933), 126–8, 249–50; founds Dachau concentration camp (1933), 127–35; establishes triangle, political police-concentration camp–SS, 130, 135, 136, 145, 181–2, 196; takes over states' political police forces (1933–4), 135–6, 139; takes over Gestapo, Prussia, (1934), 141–5, 152; and terror system, 128–35, 144–5, 181–2, 197, 223, 249–50, 251, 267–8, 292, 298, 310–1, 314, 325, 377, 380, 428, 430–2, 468, 471, 487–8, 491, 500, 516, 527–33, 549–53, 603; purge of Röhm's SA (1934), 145–63, 161, 206, 232, 481, 586; plans ceremonies to replace Christian ceremonies, 170–4; appointed Chief of German Police (1936), 184–5, 194; conspires against Generals Blomberg and Fritsch (1937–8), 212–7; and 'Opposition' to Hitler, 210–1, 217–8, 231–2, 326–7, 329, 378, 383, 411–2, 421–5, 480–1, 489–92, 495–502, 506–8, 516, 521–2, 529–30, 535, 586; and Anschluss (1938), 220–23; and take-over of Czechoslovakia (1938–9), 229–30, 234, 250–1; and Reichskristallnacht pogrom (1938), 237–44; and euthanasia programme (1939), 262, 331; and attack on Poland (1939), 263–4, 267, 270; and policy for Poland, 270–3, 280–1, 286–93, 297–8, 301–7, 310–11, 317, 323, 325, 524 (*and see* policy for occupied east below); appointed Reichskommissar for the Consolidation of German Nationhood (1939), 275, 291–4, 297, 307, 310, 347, 363–7, 388, 460, 535; and Venlo/Burgerbräu incidents (1939), 283–6; witnesses executions (1939), 290, (Minsk, 1941), 342–3, (Auschwitz, 1942), 391–3, (Sobibor, 1943), 416–7, (Mauthausen, 1944), 435; and attack on France (1940), 299–300; and attack on Russia (1941), 316, 322–4, 327–9, 331, 339–41, 368–70; takes mistress, 233–4, 320; becomes father by mistress, 366, 539, 576; and policy for occupied east, 323–6, 331–2, 335, 339–41, 344, 347, 359–60, 362–7, 385–6, 388–9, 395–6, 399, 400–2, 439–40, 442–3, 457–60, 472–3, 551; and Final Solution to Jewish question, 272–3, 276, 302–7, 315, 332–3, 344, 348, 353–5, 357–8, 371–3, 385–6, 390–3, 404, 408, 416–8, 446, 468–70, 475, 483–6, 519, 545–8, 551–2, 572, 576, 584, 586, 590; and ends Final Solution, 545–8; and sterilisation experiments, 332–3, 373–4, 390, 439–40 *and see* medical experiments; speaks at Heydrich's funeral (1942), 381–7; worries over Hitler's health, 409–11, 602; protects Canaris, 422–4; appointed Minister of Interior and Plenipotentiary for Reich Administration (1943), 426, 430, 471; and anti-Partisan/Resistance campaign, 430–2, 442, 445–6, 466–8, 524–7, 553, 563; orders destruction

379–80, 424, 426, 514, 518, 563, 565, 576, 583, 593, 608
Germany: historical, 18, 21, 24–5, 27, 30, 34–5, 38, 74; militarism, 24–5, 27, 32–4; capitalism, 113–4, 119, 206, 544; inflation, 55, 58, 75, 95, 107; geopolitical, 74, 150–2, 202, 206, 211–2, 244, 257–9, 264–5, 308–9, 313–4, 329–30, 336, 383, 463, 489–90, 498, 518–9, 522, 526, 536, 546, 563, 574–5, 603; opposition to Hitler, *see* Hitler, and assassination attempts, 20 July 1944 bomb attempt *and* Himmler, *and* Opposition
Gerstein, Dr Kurt, 398–9
Gestapo, 122, 141–5, 148, 158, 162–3, 184, 197, 199–201, 210, 214–6, 221, 227, 232, 240–2, 249–50, 267, 272–3, 278, 284, 294–5, 309, 339, 346, 380, 417, 423, 427–9, 431–2, 442, 481–2, 497, 499–500, 506–8, 510, 513, 516–7, 527, 532–3, 554, 589, 596, 603
Gill/Rodionov, ex. Red Army Major, 442–3, 467
Gisevius, Hans-Bernd, 158–9, 162, 210, 213–6, 230, 232, 234–6, 263, 282, 498–9, 505, 530
Globocnik, Odilo, 334, 371–2, 377, 385–6, 399, 453
Glücks, Richard, 310–12, 321–2, 362, 441, 486, 606
Goebbels, Dr Josef, 82, 84–5, 87–8, 99, 117, 119–20, 123–4, 146, 153–4, 157, 189, 225–6, 233, 238, 243, 245, 257, 264, 269, 272, 283, 314, 332, 337, 373, 377, 387, 408, 411, 419, 429, 443, 466, 471, 483, 489, 491–2, 499, 508, 511–2, 514–6, 518, 535–6, 543, 546, 552, 555, 563–9, 571, 577, 579, 581, 585–8, 596–600, 608
Goerdeler, Karl, 209, 214, 216, 230–2, 237, 244–5, 264, 288, 378, 421–2, 424, 427, 479, 489–90, 500, 506, 529–30, 545, 589
Göring, Hermann, 65–6, 69, 98, 117, 122–5, 140–4, 146–63, 181, 184, 202–3, 208–9, 211–5, 217–8, 220–2, 226–7, 232, 240, 242–3, 245, 248, 250, 263–5, 268, 272, 276–7, 281, 284, 294, 309, 311–12, 314, 324, 326, 332, 336, 343–4, 348, 357–8, 362, 375, 405–6, 412, 415–6, 419, 424, 476, 496, 509, 515–6, 535, 537, 545, 559–60, 564, 569, 587–8, 594–6, 598–9
Gottberg, SS-Oberführer v., 250, 310
Grafeneck Castle, 276, 303
Grawitz, Ernst v., 333, 438, 461
Great Britain: historical, 18, 34; geopolitical, 74, 150–1, 202, 211, 251, 257–8, 264–5, 308, 313–4, 326, 329, 330, 383, 409, 463, 474, 489–90, 518–9, 522, 526, 536, 544, 560, 563, 574–5, 603; *and see* Czechoslovakia, German take-over
Greifelt, SS-Brigadeführer, 307, 366–7, 388
Greim, Ritter v., 596–7, 600–2
Greiser, Arthur, 299, 306, 457
Gross Rosen, 311
Grothmann, Werner, 608–9
Gruhn, Erna, 212–4, 216–7
Grynszpan, Herschel, 237–8
Guderian, Heinz, 491, 556–63, 566, 571–2, 575, 577, 586–7
Gürtner, Dr Franz, 73, 181, 183–4, 214, 357
Gusen, 195
Gütt, Dr, 201
gypsies, 261, 276–7, 293, 303, 373, 390, 395, 439–40, 552

Habsburg, Otto v., 222–3
Haeften, Werner v., 502–3, 505–7, 513, 528–9
Hagen, Dr Hans, 511
Hager, Luise, 28, 41
Haggenmüller, Karl, 24–5, 29, 205, 552
Hahn, Kurt, 504–5
Hahn, Dr Ludwig, 446–7, 524
Halder, Franz, 230, 232, 235, 284–5, 313–6, 335, 408–9, 531, 589
Halifax, Lord, 226, 231, 235, 244, 251, 265
Hamilton, Duke of, 329–30
Hansen, Georg, 497–9, 510, 529

Brack, Dr Viktor, 260, 262, 303, 348–9, 358, 373, 439
Brand, 47–9, 60, 79
Brandt, Dr Karl, 261, 476
Brandt, Dr Rudolf, 268, 308, 320, 368, 418, 420, 459–60, 462, 465, 537, 556, 561, 567, 569, 581–2, 590–2, 606, 608
Brauchitsch, Walter v., 218, 226–7, 230, 235, 284–5, 287–8, 335, 356, 531
Braun, Eva, 546, 584–5, 597–9
Braun, Wernher v., 465
Bräutigam, Dr Otto, 353
Brockdorff-Ahlefeldt, Erich v., 230, 232
Brown House, Nazi Party HQ, Munich, 94, 111–2, 116, 136
Buchenwald, 183–4, 242, 441, 482, 487, 547, 549–51, 607, 610
Buchman, Frank, 202–3, 232–3
Burckhardt, Carl, 198, 326–7, 329
Burgdorf, Wilhelm, 546, 592, 598, 600
Burgerbräukeller, Putsch (1923), 64–6, 76, 86, 90, 108, 172, 196; meeting (1924), 81; bomb plot (1939), 282–6, 588

Caesar, Dr Joachim, 390
Canaris, Erika, 109, 197
Canaris, Wilhelm, 108–10, 197–8, 210–11, 215–21, 226, 229–32, 235–6, 251, 253, 263, 265, 274–5, 278, 281–2, 286, 296, 309, 314, 326, 329, 346, 381, 407, 409, 414, 421–4, 479–80, 493, 497–9, 530, 588
castration, experiments: *see* Medical experiments
Chamberlain, H. Stewart, 54–5, 67–8, 71
Chamberlain, Neville, 231–2, 234–7, 244, 251–2, 257, 263, 265–6
Chelmno (Kulmhof), 358, 372, 417
Churchill, Winston, 308, 313, 315, 330, 337, 349, 359, 421, 490, 494–5, 518, 536, 544–5, 547, 560, 563, 574–5, 595, 610
Clauberg, Prof. Carl, 332–3, 373, 377, 440
concentration camps: *see* Auschwitz, Belsen, Buchenwald, Dachau, Dora, Flossenbürg, Gross Rosen, Gusen, Lichtenburg, Mauthausen, Natzweiler, Neuengamme, Ravensbrück, Theresienstadt; *see also* Extermination camps; 'wild' camps, 125, 127, 129, 310–1; discipline and conditions, 128–30; 133–5, 181–4, 250, 310–11, 395, 432–3, 441–2, 487–8, 547–52, 582, 607, 610; *see* Himmler, terror system; medical experiments in, *see* Medical experiments
Consul(Org. 'C'), 56, 108
Cremer, Ali, 601–2
Czechoslovakia, German take-over of, 225–7, 229–32, 234–7, 240, 245, 250–1; government in exile, 378–9

Dachau, 9–10, 127–36, 138, 157, 182, 196, 198, 202, 222–3, 282, 286, 321, 377, 441, 582, 588
Dahlerus, Birger, 265, 545–7
Daladier, Edouard, 234–6
D'Alquen, Gunter, 561
D'Alquen, Rolf, 561, 606
Daluege, Kurt, 99–100, 122, 125–6, 158–9, 185, 197, 220, 271, 324, 379, 445, 531
Dannecker, Theodor, 475
Darré, Walter, 70, 102, 115, 147, 179, 307
Darwin, Charles, 32, 171
Darwinism, Social-, 34, 91, 97; *see* Hitler, as Social-Darwinist and *see* *Mein Kampf*
Dawes Plan, 79, 95
Death's Head formations: *see* SS, concentration camp guards, Totenkopf formations
De Crinis, Prof. Max, 331
Dering, Dr Wladislaw, 439
Diebitsch, Prof., 172, 174, 176, 248
Diehl, Karoline ('Nini'), *see* Rascher, Nini
Diels, Rudolf, 122–4, 126, 130, 136, 141–4, 146, 148, 153, 155–6, 162, 186
Dietrich, 'Sepp', 156, 300, 313, 495, 498, 501, 555, 560, 568, 575, 577, 579

Volkssturm the peoples' army or home defence units
Waffen SS SS field troops
WVHA Economics and Administration Head Office of the SS

SS Ranks

Untersturmführer junior lieutenant
Obersturmführer lieutenant
Hauptsturmführer captain
Sturmbannführer major
Obersturmbannführer lieutenant-colonel
Standartenführer colonel
Oberführer brigadier
Brigadeführer major general
Gruppenführer lieutenant general
Obergruppenführer general
Oberstgruppenführer colonel-general

46 Wilmot, pp. 704–5; Padfield, pp. 415–16; Steinert, p. 139
47 Le Degrelle, *Die verlorene Legion*, Stuttgart, 1955, pp. 473 *ff*; cited Reitlinger, p. 443
48 See Dr Best to Fraenkel; Manvell & Fraenkel, p. 241
49 Steinert, pp. 148–9; Reitlinger, pp. 443–4; Speer, *Erinnerungen*, op. cit. (ref. 75, ch 16), p. 497, confirms Himmler's attitude while not mentioning his presence at this conference, no doubt for the same reasons which prompted his manifold other evasions.
50 Frischauer, p. 255
51 Broszat (ed.), p. 148
52 Ibid.
53 See ibid., pp. 148–9
54 See Frischauer, p. 254
55 D. Mehner to Fraenkel; Manvell & Fraenkel, p. 273
56 And see his last speech in Trevor-Roper, *Last Days*, pp. 225–6
57 Order regarding attitude to be adopted to occupying powers; OKW KTB, 11.5.1945; cited Padfield, p. 427
58 OKW KTB, 15.5.1945; cited Padfield, p. 426
59 Cited Trevor-Roper, *Last Days*, p. 22
60 Prof. Gebhardt testimony; *Doctors' Trials*, Nuremberg, IX, p. 3980; IWM
61 J. Kiermaier; cited Manvell & Fraenkel, p. 244
62 President C. Herzog (former Intelligence Officer with 32nd Guards) t author, 2.2.1988
63 Selvester; cited Manvell & Fraenkel p. 245
64 To author, 2.2.1988
65 Niall MacDermot (formerly Chief Counter Intelligence 21st Army G HQ) to author, 9.6.1988
66 Manvell & Fraenkel, p. 247
67 *Manchester Guardian* and *Daily Telegraph* (London), 28.5.1945, state trousers and boots.
68 C. Herzog to author, 2.2.1988; an see H. Harris to *The Times*, London 31.1.1983
69 Frischauer, p. 10; *Daily Telegraph*, London, 28.5.1945
70 Frischauer, p. 258
71 Niall MacDermot to author, 9.6.1988

R. Brandt to Kriegbaum), 30.1.1945; IWM H/13/233
14 RFSS to Frau Lina Heydrich, 7.2.1945; Heiber, p. 306
15 12.2.1945; Heiber, p. 305
16 W. v. Oven, *Mit Goebbels bis zum Ende*, Buenos Aires, 1949, 2, p. 245; cited Reitlinger, p. 404
17 8.3.1945; Trevor-Roper (ed.), *Goebbels Diaries*, p. 80
18 See Erickson, p. 517
19 Cited Irving, p. 769
20 Schellenberg, p. 438
21 Ibid., p. 437
22 4.2.1945; IWM H/1/202
23 7.3.1945; Trevor-Roper (ed.), *Goebbels Diaries*, p. 71
24 See Hewins, pp. 109 *f*
25 Ibid., p. 118
26 Schellenberg, p. 437
27 Col. Eismann narrative in J. Thorwald, *Es begann an der Weichsel*, Stuttgart, 1950, p. 285; cited Reitlinger, pp. 405–6; and H. Guderian, *Panzer Leader*, London, 1952, p. 413; cited Manvell & Fraenkel, p. 212
28 20.2.1945; cited Manvell & Fraenkel, p. 213
29 See Erickson, p. 522; Trevor-Roper (ed.), *Goebbels Diaries*, 4.3.1945, p. 40
30 Ibid., p. 46
31 Ibid., pp. 40–1
32 R. Brandt to H. Johst, 14.3.1945; Heiber, p. 316
33 5–12.3.1945; Kersten, pp. 276–7
34 Ibid., p. 277
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38 12.3.1945; Trevor-Roper (ed.), *Goebbels Diaries*, p. 112
39 Bericht an das Reichsministerium für . . . Propaganda, 19.3.1945; Boberach, 17, p. 6732
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43 15.3.1945; Trevor-Roper (ed.), *Goebbels Diaries*, p. 145
44 Speer, *Spandau*, p. 200
45 Ibid.
46 Speer Doc. 027; cited Bullcok, p. 707
47 A. Speer testimony; IMT XVII, p. 35; cited Bullock, p. 707
48 Trevor-Roper (ed.), *Goebbels Diaries*, p. 71
49 Cited Manvell & Fraenkel, p. 215
50 17.3.1945; Kersten, p. 281
51 21.3.1945; Archive Kersten, Stockholm; cited Fleming, pp. 177–8
52 21.3.1945; Trevor-Roper (ed.), *Goebbels Diaires*, p. 191
53 See Ryan, pp. 61 *f*
54 Ibid., p. 71
55 Guderian, op. cit. (ref. 27 above) p. 387; cited Reitlinger, p. 414
56 v. Lang, p. 263, states that on returning to Italy on 8.2.1945 Wolff ordered every indication of contact with the enemy to be reported to him.
57 Himmler papers deposited by Manvell & Fraenkel in Wiener Lib.
58 v. Lang, p. 269
59 Dulles, *Surrender*, p. 116
60 Ibid.
61 Erickson, p. 527; Wilmot, p. 688
62 SHAEF Intelligence survey, 11.3.1945 cited Wilmot, p. 690
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64 To Kersten, 21.3.1945, op. cit. (ref. 51 above)
65 v. Lang, p. 272
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68 27.3.1945; Trevor-Roper (ed.), *Goebbels Diaries*, p. 245
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82 Ibid., p. 87
83 Ibid., p. 417
84 Cited Fleming, p. 178; see Berben, p. 184

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65 Rundschreiben No. 4, 20.7.1944, 21.20 hours; ibid., p. 183
66 Wire to all diplomatic missions, 24.7.1944; ibid., p. 188
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68 Royce (ed.), p. 180
69 Rundschreiben, op. cit. (ref. 65 above)
70 Wire, op. cit. (ref. 66 above)
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72 24.7.1944, op. cit. (ref. 64 above)
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78 17.11.1938; T–175, Roll 88, Fr. 2611474
79 26.7.1944, op. cit. (ref. 55 above)
80 Ibid.
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82 Voice of the SS, 20.8.1944, 11.30 hours; ibid.
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3 L. Hahn; cited Deschner, *Warsaw*, p. 17
4 E. Rode's testimony; cited Woods, p. 74; and see Deschner, *Warsaw*, p. 79
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20 Ibid., 16.8.1944, p. 242
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23 Peter (ed.), 12.10.1944, p. 445 ('Gerüchte um den 20 Juli 1944')
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25 Eyewitness to the execution; cited ibid., pp. 210–11
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27 Fernschreiben to all police stations, 21.8.1944, 17.00 hours; ibid.
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Chapter 12: The Herrenmensch

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66 15.5.1940; Heiber, p. 80
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95 Ibid.
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23 'Franzosen, Franzosen, O gebt nur recht acht
Für Euch wird no Pardon gemacht.
Uns're Kugeln pfeifen und sausen
Und verbreiten Euch Schrecken und Grauen
Wenn wir da so unheimlich hausen.'
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Hallgarten	G.W.F. Hallgarten, 'Mein Mitschuler Heinrich Himmler', *Germania Judaica, Bulletin der Kölner Bibliothek zur Geschichte des deutschen Judentum*, No. 2, 1960/1, pp. 4–7.
Loewenberg	P. Loewenberg, 'The Unsuccessful Adolescence of Heinrich Himmler', *American Historical Review*, 76(3), 1971, pp. 612 *ff.*

The following abbreviations are used:

BA	Bundesarchiv, Koblenz
DC	Document Centre, Berlin
F/Vorträge	C-in-C Kriegsmarine (Navy) reports and discussions with the Führer (microfilm Nav. Lib.)
G.H.	Gebhard Himmler, H.H.'s brother
Gruf	SS-Gruppenführer
HD	Himmler documents, Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, Stanford University, Calif., USA
H.H.	Heinrich Himmler
H.H. book list	in BA *Nachlass Himmler/II Leseliste*
H.H. diary	in HD, Hoover Institute, Stanford University
IfZ	*Institut für Zeitgeschichte*, Munich
IMT	International Military Tribunal; evidence and documents presented at the trials of the major war criminals, published Nuremberg, 1948; English language edition (unless otherwise stated)
IWM	Imperial War Museum, London
MGM	*Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen* (journal of military history)
NA	US National Archives, Washington DC
Nav. Lib.	Naval Library, Ministry of Defence, London
PRO	Public Record Office, Kew Gardens, London
RFSS	Reichsführer-SS, Heinrich Himmler
Stuf	SS-Sturmbannführer
T–175	Microfilm class at NA (Fr. = frame number)
VJHZ	*Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte* (quarterly journal of contemporary history)
Wiener Lib.	Wiener Library, London

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