

Is Another Nazi War Criminal Still Alive?

The first American to enter Berlin in 1945 tells how
Martin Bormann, an S. S. officer more evil than Eichmann, could have escaped death

By Brig. Gen. FRANK L. HOWLEY (ret.) as told to Jack Ryan

U. S. Commandant in Berlin, 1945-49

JUSTICE HAS finally caught up with Adolf Eichmann, the Nazi war criminal responsible for the deaths of 6 million Jews. But what about the other Nazi chiefs, even bigger than Eichmann, who have never been brought to justice?

As the first American to enter Berlin by land in 1945, I'm often asked this question—and the name that seems to haunt the world's conscience most is Martin Bormann. Could Adolf Hitler's political heir-designate have escaped the Russian ravaging of Berlin? Could he be hiding, as reported recently, in South America?

I must answer—yes, it is possible.

In the dying days of the third Reich, Martin Bormann, a fanatical anti-Christian, Jew-killer, and ruthless intriguer, rose from a court lackey to become Hitler's confidant and Deputy Fuehrer, succeeding Rudolf Hess. When Hitler married Eva Braun deep in the bombarded Reichschancellery bunker, Bormann was the official witness. Twenty-four hours later, Bormann carried the body of the bride out of her room after she had swallowed poison. He watched S. S. men place it beside the body of Hitler, who had shot himself. As Berlin flamed around him and shells burst overhead, he saw the gasoline-soaked corpses set on fire.

For Bormann, however, this was not the end. In his pocket he carried one of the four copies of Hitler's last will and testament. It virtually left control of the Nazi party to him. Around midnight May 1, Bormann led a band of diehards out of the bunker, hoping to escape the Russian cordon.

LITTLE OF THIS was known to me in the spring of 1945. I was too busy at the time setting up the American military government team which would occupy our sector of Berlin. A few weeks after Bormann's dash from the bunker, however, I led a column of Jeeps and trucks across the Elbe and into Russian-occupied Germany. It was an eerie trip. We burst upon scenes of incredible confusion as thousands of refugees streamed along the road. Among them, we guessed, were deserters from the Wehrmacht—and perhaps Nazi officials.

Once, we drove along a ridge black with German troops and refugees. There must have been 500,000 of them. "If there are any war criminals around," somebody in the convoy commented, "they're getting a running start to freedom."



Martin Bormann

Once in Berlin, our intelligence began piecing together the bloody fate of the Nazi war lords. Among the missing was Martin Bormann. He seemed to have vanished. Six months later, we captured Artur Axmann, leader of the fanatical Hitler Youth group which had been almost annihilated protecting their Fuehrer in his last hours.

Axmann had fled with Bormann, but in the wild confusion of battle they had separated. Axmann told our officers that when he reached a bridge over the Invalidenstrasse he saw two bodies. In the moonlight, he recognized one as Bormann. He saw no wounds but knew he was dead.

From the outset, we questioned Axmann's story, although he proved generally reliable. Only Hitler's chauffeur corroborated it, but no other evidence of Bormann's death ever was discovered.

Later I saw the Reichschancellery and passed along the exit routes the Nazis used—some to death, others to safety, still others to oblivion. The picture I got indicated how possible an escape was.

A no man's land around the chancellery gave the bunker fugitives a good start to freedom, but even when they ran into streets where pitched battles were being fought they stood a chance of survival. Many civilians, scurrying through these thoroughfares, were virtually ignored by both Russian and German soldiers who were mainly con-

cerned with fighting their armed enemies.

While ignoring noncombatants, the Russians were barbaric toward military prisoners. A captured S. S. man, for example, could expect only one treatment: as he knelt in the street, a Russian machine gunner would riddle a neat X across his back. We soon learned that Bormann, wily as ever, protected himself against this fate. When he was seen near the Hotel Atlas by S. S. Major Joachim Tibertius, who successfully fled the bunker and later related his adventure to us, he had junked his S. S. general's coat for a drab civilian one.

We know Bormann followed railroad tracks to a station on the Invalidenstrasse, then headed west. This area, I believe, saw little action at the time, but when Bormann approached a railway bridge, he ran into heavy Russian fire. And at this point, we lose track of the man whom fellow Nazis called "the Brown Eminence."

Bormann certainly would have committed suicide if faced with capture, but he was not a man to give up so easily. Unlike other Nazi higher-ups, he wanted very much to live, especially since he believed he would be a power in the "new Reich." Our information indicated that the Russians did not control the bridge or its approaches in those crucial hours, and while their fire was heavy it did not stop other fugitives from crossing—and, like Axmann, living to tell about it.

ON MAY 17, German officers said they saw Bormann in Czechoslovakia, posing as a game-keeper. Several months later, we received a report he had turned up in Switzerland. Like more recent reports of his presence in a remote state of Brazil, these could not be proved.

So the question of Bormann's fate remains a question. Did he outwit the Russians in his civilian garb to dash across the Invalidenstrasse and be swallowed up in the faceless tide of refugees? Or did a stray bullet or shell fragment send him to an unmarked grave? Major Tibertius said, "Bormann had as good a chance to escape as I did, and I got to Munich in July with six men."

With a little luck, Martin Bormann had every chance of vanishing in the incredible confusion of the war's last great battle—and of being alive today, wondering how long it will be before he meets the fate of Adolf Eichmann.

COVER:

Photographed by John Engstead, screen and TV star Donna Reed sets the pre-holiday mood in a striking lounge outfit—only one of the lovely creations you can make at home. See the exclusive pattern offer, p. 12.

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