

DANIEL WYATT

FOO FIGHTERS

DANIEL WYATT

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FOREWORD

“Since I entered politics I have chiefly had men’s views confided to me privately. Some of the biggest men in the United States, in the field of commerce and manufacture, are afraid of somebody, are afraid of something. They know that there is power somewhere so organized, so subtle, so watchful, so interlocked, so complete, so pervasive, that they had better not speak above their breath when they speak in condemnation of it.”

Woodrow Wilson, 1913

far as to say that he hoped that Bormann would rot in hell one day soon! Others in authority echoed Goering's remarks.

Martin Bormann was Adolf Hitler's personal secretary, answerable only to the Fuehrer. Bormann was the mystery person. He toiled in the shadows as Hitler's spokesman, carrying with him the important title of Reichsleiter. Feared by the other Nazi leaders, he secured his position by hanging onto Hitler's coattails, while remaining virtually unknown in the public eye. Unlike Hermann Goering and others, titles meant nothing to the forty-four-year old Bormann. Power was everything. To reach Hitler, one had to go through

Bormann knew it. It was the Party. This afternoon in his hut next to Hitler's, Bormann was scribbling on his writing pad. He was dressed in his favorite attire, Reichsleiter uniform consisting of reddish-brown service tunic, gold-braided red armband adorned with black swastika, gold insignia featuring his rank on the collar flaps, tight riding breeches and glossy-black riding boots.

"Bormann!" the Fuehrer shouted from next door.

Bormann bounced to his feet, trotting around the corner, his daily log – his *tagebuch* – in hand. "Yes, mein Fuehrer."

"Close the door, Bormann," Hitler ordered, his voice labored and raspy. "I need to have a word with you."

"Yes, mein Fuehrer."

Hitler was pacing the floor, slowly, stooped over. "We have no choice but to make haste to Berlin. There we will make our final stand. Is the Fuehrerbunker at the Chancellory ready?"

Bormann hadn't expected the move so soon. "They are putting the finishing touches to it as we speak, mein Fuehrer."

"How much longer?"

"One week, mein Fuehrer."

"Make the arrangements. I am too busy with other matters."

The order didn't sound too difficult to Bormann. "Certainly, mein Fuehrer." Bormann knew what matters those were – tending to the mighty Russian Red Army knocking at Hitler's door in the snow only a few miles

away. For weeks Bormann had received only scant attention from the Fuehrer, so now was a good time to ask about the idea he had been toying with.

“Mein Fuehrer?”

“Yes?”

“May I have your permission to see my wife for a few days? I promise to be back in time for the move to Berlin.”

With listless eyes, Hitler stared at his secretary for a long period. “Yes, go ahead. You deserve it. Gerda is a good woman. Spend some time with her.” He tore at an individually-wrapped chocolate and popped it in his mouth.

“Thank you, mein Fuehrer.”

Hitler grunted, plunking himself down in his chair. His shaky hand went out to his loyal Alsatian dog, Blondi. Only twenty minutes out of bed, the Fuehrer’s face was ashen. For months he had taken to being moody, with frequent fits of rage. He was a recluse. Dependent on drugs, he was sleeping in until early afternoon every day. The rest of the time he was a walking skeleton, his clothes drooping on him. Bormann thought it pathetic how the Fuehrer was fighting a war on words only, now that his 1945 empire was a mere one-tenth the size it was during its peak in late 1941, when all Europe trembled at the sight and sound of Nazi jackboots. No more.

“Everyone has turned against me. My generals! Some generals! We had the strongest army on earth. We had Moscow in our sights. We had control of the continent.

My backers! They were the worst! They were the true traitors. They deserted me.”

“Are you referring to the group?”

Hitler patted his dog. “Yes, Bormann. Of course, the group!” he shouted, trying to sustain the anger in his voice, and failing. “And to think some of them were Americans. Prominent Americans who expected favors. Wall Street money. They only wanted me to dig Germany and Europe out of the Depression. They didn’t want to see the misery spread elsewhere. Europe needed a leader. And I was it. I had great and wonderful designs for a new Europe. So did they. They agreed to it. A united Europe with a common currency, a central bank. My Council of Peace. A European Economic Community that would include Great Britain, had they so wished. Then they decided I was no longer useful to them. They sold me out.” Hitler breathed a sigh.

“Yes, they did, mein Fuehrer.” Bormann had heard his leader explode about this same subject only four days before. You can’t fight the people who sign the checks, Mein Fuehrer, he thought.

“They left me and Germany on our own,” Hitler continued, intoxicated at the sound of his voice. “Those rich Jews in the group engineered this act of treachery. George Washington once said that it is better to be alone than be in bad company. Britain was my friend. My ally. I sought peace with them. We could have had a great future in alliance with Britain. They could have kept their sea power, leaving us with the continent. That was the arrangement. Crush the Russians! The hordes of the

east. Then that bastard Churchill came along to spoil everything.”

“Yes, he surely did, mein Fuehrer.”

“*Mein Kampf* was written in vain. England was our friend, and we fought them. So useless. Oh, so useless. But we still have our secret weapons. But there’s more. Our scientists and their machines will turn the tide where our imbecile generals have failed.”

Bormann smiled. “You are absolutely right, mein Fuehrer, as usual.”

Hitler rose to his feet, a sudden quickness to his movements. “I know I’m right! Go, now. See your wife. I have to attend a military conference. Go, but hurry back.”

“Of course, mein Fuehrer.” Bormann stood in an instant. “I will always be your humble servant.”

“Yes, yes. Give my compliments to your dear wife.”

“I will, mein Fuehrer. And she will give you hers, I’m sure.”

Hitler smiled, sadly, lost in something else for the moment.

Bormann clicked his heels and excused himself. At his office, he wrote down what he had remembered Hitler had said to him, a ritual that the secretary had started that week. Recording every word uttered from the Fuehrer’s mouth in his daily log was one way to keep his mind occupied and off smoking, which he had quit at Christmas. It was also for posterity, for future generations.

Near Hamburg, Germany

Word had come down. Zerstoror Unit 22 had their assignment.

An hour after sundown, two men in overalls slid back the long, steel-plated hangar door at Loebitz airfield. Two more men joined them and began the task of rolling out and positioning the strange, shiny fighters on the outside concrete.

Six machines in total.

Finished, the four men stood back in awe. These fighters were an odd, distinct shape, smaller than the Messerschmitt BF-109's on the far side of the airfield. Each machine had an undercarriage, complete with tires. It had wings, if you could call them wings, and a long nozzle poking out the nose. But there was no room for a pilot aboard. Too tiny, for one thing. Besides, there was no access to the cockpit. These same four men were told by their superiors when the machines arrived the day before that this was Germany's new, revolutionary fighter-interceptor that would change the course of the war.

This was the V-4 – designated the Messerschmitt V-4 Experimental Series 1-1a – fourth in the series of the vengeance weapons.

The four men relaxed, lit cigarettes in the night air, and waited for the voice prompt from the tower. The sergeant in charge looked to the starry sky, devoid of any Allied bombers for the moment. But they'd be coming on schedule. As sure as the sun rises in the east.

Soon. In minutes, probably.

“Do you think these things will actually work?” one of the men said.

The sergeant dragged on his cigarette, delaying his answer. “It’ll be... interesting.” He nodded. “Yes, they’ll work.”

“I wish I could be up there to see them perform.”

“Me, too. You know, I have an idea.” The sergeant grinned. “Why not strap yourself to one of them?”

“Hey, don’t pass that around. Our superiors may ask someone to do it.”

The men laughed in agreement, their voices echoing off the hangar.

“Yes, you may be right.”

“I know I’m right.”

CHAPTER TWO

London – January 14

Wesley Hollinger got up fifteen minutes before the alarm could scream in his ear and kissed his wife on the cheek. No response. Then he shuffled his way to the bathroom, careful not to wake her. She needed her rest more than ever in her present pregnant state. Quietly as he could, he found his shaving brush in the medicine cabinet and lathered his face. He sighed, grabbed for the razor and began the routine.

“Ouch!”

“Sliced yourself again?”

Hollinger saw his wife at the door. “What are you doing? I thought you were sleeping.”

“Good grief.” Roberta tied her nightgown at her waist. “How can I, with the racket in here.”

Hollinger grabbed a piece of toilet paper to stop the bleeding on his chin and looked in the mirror. “Sorry.” Roberta never ceased to amaze him. She could climb out of bed first thing in the morning and still look like a million bucks.

She smiled, and stepped forward, hugging her husband from behind, kissing his neck, her long, shiny, red hair falling on his bare back. “Don’t flatter me.”

“Going into work today?” he asked, his voice soft.

“Later.”

“How’d you manage that?”

“I cleared it with the colonel.”

“Pull, huh?”

“Bloody damn right, Yank.”

He returned a smile, eyeing her in the mirror, while pressing the toilet paper to his skin. Under her floor-length nightgown, Roberta was a slim, brown-eyed, slender-nosed, extremely attractive English woman moored on thin but sturdy legs. She kissed him on the neck.

“And what, pray-tell, is that for?” he asked.

“I love you.”

“Normally, I’d return the favor and plant one. But I don’t want to smear blood all over your face.”

The young couple giggled.

She let go of him and stood sideways before the mirror. “Look.”

“What?” Hollinger continued shaving.

“Me, dummy.” She stroked her stomach.

“So?”

“I feel so bloated.”

“Come on, Robbie. You can’t even tell,” he teased her.

“I can.”

“Well, yeah, maybe a bit. Looks like you had an extra serving at the table.”

“Thanks.”

“You’re welcome.” He slapped her on the rump.

“Hey!” She turned and slapped him hard on the back, then grabbed him.

“No, don’t!” he screamed. “We promised. Remember, no tickling! We made a pact.”

“I just broke it.”

“No!”

Laughing, he pinned her left arm to the wall and kissed her hard on the mouth, while she ran her free hand through his long, wavy hair.

“There, now you have blood on your face,” he said.

Four months into her pregnancy, Roberta Langford-Hollinger had been able to hide her condition so far, except for her fuller face. Her regular clothes still fit her, for now. According to her doctor everything was going fine. Despite some occasional morning sickness, Roberta told her husband and the doctor that she felt healthy enough. She was eating regular meals, without throwing up, and she had quit smoking.

After breakfast of toast and strong, imported American coffee, Hollinger quick-kissed his wife goodbye, donned his coat, left the third-story apartment with an umbrella, and strode the five blocks in the light, chilly rain to OSS headquarters on Grosvenor Street, only a few doors down from General Eisenhower’s Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force.

Along the way, Hollinger recalled his first sight of London. It was the fall of 1940, in the middle of the Blitz, when the city and the country had stood alone against

Hitler. Hollinger was one of the first American Intelligence agents to arrive – new, green, impressionable, and single. Back home in the States, he had remembered the cool, calm, much-in-command radio voice of CBS's Edward Murrow, broadcasting live from the war-torn city to millions of Americans, as if it were yesterday:

“This... is London. Trafalgar Square. The noise that you hear at the moment is the sound of an air raid siren. I'm standing here just on the steps of St Martin's in the Field. It's almost impossible to realize that men are killing and being killed, even when you see that ever-thickening streak of smoke pouring down from the sky which means a plane and perhaps several men are going down in flames. The sense of danger, death, and disaster comes only when the familiar incidents occur. The sight of half a dozen ambulances weighted down with an unseen cargo of human wreckage has jarred me more than the roar of dive bombers or the sounds of bombs. But London has gotten used to it. A near miss rocked the cab I was in one evening. The old man slid back the window and remarked, 'You know, sir, Hitler'll do that once too often, once.’”

Everything had changed in the five years since the awful Blitz. Hitler did do it once too often. The hunter had now become the hunted.

At the office, Hollinger dove into the papers his efficient, forty-year-old American secretary brought to him in a locked briefcase. Wesley Hollinger was a blue-eyed, six-foot, trim-as-an-athlete, twenty-seven-year old OSS agent, with a fetish for expensive custom suits and

wide-brimmed fedoras. The ruggedly-handsome, hot-rock agent had worked his way up to second-in-command of the OSS Secret Intelligence branch – the SI – in mid-1944. Since then, he had been given his own secretary, who this morning had briefed him on information of the much-heralded German secret arsenal of weapons deployed against the Allies. The information included several fast jet and rocket aircraft, the deadly V-1 pilotless flying bomb, and the even-deadlier V-2 intercontinental rocket. With the war drawing to a close, the SI's mission was to obtain all the data it could on the subject of Nazi secret weapons. So far, the OSS agents were doing their job in enemy territory, substantiated by the photographs and hand-drawn maps of the locations of these assembly sites in the file at his fingertips.

Hollinger looked it over until the desk telephone rang. He lifted the receiver, slowly. "Hollinger here."

"Wesley. I want to see you. Pronto."

"Yes, sir."

Hollinger took to the main hall and ducked through the white-lettered oak door marked SI DIRECTOR, where Jack Dorwin was behind his desk. In his thirty-eighth year, Dorwin was a heavy-set man, built along the lines of an overweight football player. His face resembled a horse's: long, with flaring nostrils. This morning his flowery red tie was too bright and his shirt too tight in the mid-section. He was one of the worst-dressed Americans at the OSS London headquarters.

“What happened to you?” Dorwin asked, looking up, inhaling a long cigar, pushing aside the memorandums in his OUT basket. He had the tired eyes of a typical overworked, stressed-out American.

“Cut myself shaving. You’re only the fifth one who asked.”

“Close the door, Wesley.”

“Yes, sir.”

“How’s that redhead wife of yours?”

“Still red. So far, so good. She’s coming along. Doesn’t show yet.”

“She will, quickly enough. Sit down, boy.”

“Thank you, sir. What’s up?”

“Here. Open it.” Dorwin slid an envelope across his desk. He stabbed his intercom box button. “Mrs. Cellborth?” he called his secretary.

“Yes, sir.”

“Would you please ask statistics for the B-49 log? In the meantime, Mr. Hollinger and I do not want to be disturbed.”

“As you wish, sir.”

“What’s this?” Hollinger wanted to know, spreading the envelope flaps.

“Orders from the boss.”

“Which one? I’ve got quite a few.”

“The man in Washington.”

“Donovan?”

“No, Roosevelt.”

“The president?” Hollinger began to read the text.

Dorwin nodded. "You're going to rendezvous with the old man. He's meeting with Churchill and Stalin. Son of a gun, boy, you must have kissed somebody's fat ass at the capital."

"Hell, I haven't seen Roosevelt in a good three years." Hollinger jabbed the paper with his finger. "By the way, where's this Yalta place?"

"Crimea. On the Black Sea. The Soviet Union."

"Oh, the Soviet Union." Hollinger began to calculate in his mind as best he could how many miles that would be. *Let's see.* Too many for him. That meant flying. He hated flying.

"I hear it's warm there all year round. Like Florida. Palm trees. You'll probably see some beautiful Russian women in bathing suits."

Hollinger folded his arms. "Beautiful women, eh? In that case I had better check with the powers-that-be on this one."

Dorwin frowned. "Who? Donovan?"

"No. My wife."

Dorwin chuckled through widely-spaced teeth. He leaned forward, elbows on his desk, cigar clutched between the fingers of his right hand. "Let me give you some advice, Wesley. A little word to the wise."

"Wise to the wise, is it? I'm listening, as always, sir."

The director scribbled something on his blotter, then looked up. "My hunch on this is that your little Crimean get-together with Roosevelt has something to do with our research and collecting of information, if you know what I mean."

Hollinger nodded. "I think I get your drift. German Secret Weapons."

"Yes. Furthermore, let me say that we have here what the OSS calls a *situation*. You're representing the SI and the OSS first, and not necessarily the will of the president. Our work is classified."

Something didn't sit right in Hollinger's craw. "But... but, sir... he's... the president."

"That don't mean shit, boy. We don't want anything leaking to the wrong people. Fact is, the OSS doesn't quite trust some people close to Roosevelt. Another thing, he's not quite himself, I hear."

"Why is he not himself?"

"Trust me on this one."

Hollinger held his boss's stare as long as he could. "Yes, sir. I understand." *I suppose.*

Over the North Sea

Sergeant Arthur Benjamin Tooney of Jamestown, North Dakota bent down and slowly grabbed the brace that attached the turret to the fuselage. With the other hand he pulled the gun-elevation hand crank away from the holding clip and placed it in the socket. Then he released the brake and cranked the turret so that the guns dropped from aft to a ninety-degree elevation. He held the hand crank in position, reached over and unlocked the door, swung it open, and braked the turret's position from the inside.

Tooney immediately heard the whistling slipstream and felt a strong draft. He flipped his goggles down over

his eyes. Through the round, thirteen-inch-diameter viewing glass, he was able to catch a clear glimpse of the eerie North Sea below, and the sunlight blinking off the white caps. Then he stood up, gripped the brace, and eased down into the turret by placing the left foot on the seat and his right foot on the stirrup. Next, he spread his legs out on the footrests on either side of the window and dropped his five-foot-five, one hundred and forty pound frame onto the armored seat. He glanced up and gestured to the waist gunner, who handed Tooney his parachute, before slam-locking the turret from the inside.

Sergeant Tooney was now alone, suspended at the bottom of the B-17 Flying Fortress bomber *Lady Luck*, cramped into the fetal position. The only sounds were the steady drone of his bomber's four radial engines and the thundering slipstream. It was a perfect three hundred and sixty degree view inside the ball turret, which he called *the best seat in the house*.

He spread out on the small seat as best he could in the confined space in his bulky, fleece-lined flight gear. He scanned the blue sky through the plexiglass. It was a bright, sunny day above scattered thick, white clouds. He flicked on the main power switch, and charged the guns by yanking back on the handles. Then he pressed the fire selector switch. By deploying the two joysticks in front of his face, Tooney controlled the movement of the hydraulically-powered turret. He spun the machine upright, then around, back and forth to check the field of fire. The turret whined and whirred in his ears.

A voice crackled over his earphone...

“PILOT TO BALL GUNNER. HOW DOES IT LOOK BACK THERE? ANY GAPS IN THE LOWER FORMATION?”

Tooney pinched his throat intercom button. “NOT A ONE, SIR. THE OTHER GROUP IS BANKED RIGHT ON OUR BEHIND.”

“THANKS. PILOT OUT.”

The bomber nosed up and climbed, the engines straining.

It was an impressive sight to Sergeant Tooney. He could see the other four-engine heavies jockeying for position, part of an American bomber stream of B-17's heading with purpose to Magdeburg, Germany, arranged in their respective groups and wings. Upper, mid, and low squadrons. Over three-hundred Big Ass Birds carrying high-explosive payloads, escorted by friendly P-51 Mustangs. From this vantage point he could see everything better than the tail gunner. He could tell who the good pilots were, and who were the so-so's, and which squadron or group ran a tight formation or not. Gosh, she was a beautiful thing to behold for the nineteen-year-old prairie boy. He wondered how many other green crews out there in the wide blue yonder were on their first mission, like his crew was, with a brand-spanking new B-17G fresh from the Boeing factory in the States to play with.

“PILOT TO CREW. TEN THOUSAND FEET. PUT OXYGEN MASKS ON.”

Tooney wrapped the rubber piece around his mouth and studied the oxygen indicator beside him. Four hundred pounds pressure. He reached under his seat to plug in his heated flying suit.

“PILOT TO GUNNERS. TEST YOUR GUNS.”

Sergeant Tooney gripped the handles of his twin Browning .50-caliber guns, his peashooters, as he referred to them. He had 250 rounds for each gun at his disposal – five armor piercing shells to one tracer – each gun preset to the thirty-two-foot wingspan of an ME-109. Accurate range of the guns at best were six hundred yards, although they were still deadly at one thousand yards. He fired three short bursts, deafened by the sound of his own guns... and saw the all-important tracers.

He sniffed. The smell of cordite hung heavy in the cold air, cutting through his rubber mask.

Hamburg

The civilian radar technician attached to Zerstoror Unit 22 picked up the blips on the screen as soon as they were of height over the North Sea, east of the East Anglia coast, and wasted no time in waving his supervisor over.

“What is it, Wolfgang?”

“Here they come in force, Herr Leyberger.”

“How many?” the supervisor asked.

“I’d guess two hundred to three hundred. Thirteen thousand feet on a heading of one-one-zero degrees.”

Visibly pleased, Leyberger tapped his technician on the shoulder. "Excellent. I will send out the alert to Loebitz airfield."

Over the North Sea

At exactly 1105 hours, the bomber formation climbed... then leveled out. In the sub-stratosphere, condensation trails began to form off the engines in the stream. In *Lady Luck's* belly, Tooney could feel every move and jitter of the aircraft. Despite the sun peering over his right shoulder, he started to feel the intense cold on his face. Small lines of frost formed on the plexiglass window at his feet, but, thankfully, not enough to blur his vision. He wiggled his toes in his boots, and pulled his insulated cap down closer to his eyebrows. It was going to get chilly.

"NAVIGATOR TO PILOT. ENEMY COAST COMING... IN TWO MINUTES."

"ROGER."

"WE SHOULDN'T EXPECT ANY FLAK. NOT IN THIS CLOUD."

"WE HOPE. PILOT OUT."

Tooney looked down at a jagged light-brown crease outlined by white surf. The coast. Tooney spotted snow and ground patches below. This was not friendly territory. He was over Germany for the first time in his life. His stomach tightened. He was in the presence of the enemy, in the range of their radar, their fighters, and their anti-aircraft guns.

“PILOT TO CREW. KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN FOR FIGHTERS.”

Sergeant Tooney saw a set of specks off to his right, appearing to move crosswise into the bomber formation. Distance, a few miles. They were closing. Fast! He remembered the flashcard images of German fighters and aircraft identification exercises back at the base. This was no drill. This was the real thing.

He counted the objects.

Two... four... six...

He pinched his throat mike. “BALL GUNNER TO PILOT. I SEE A BUNCH OF FIGHTERS. EIGHT O’CLOCK LEVEL. COMING STRAIGHT FOR US!”

“CALM DOWN. BE SPECIFIC,” the pilot, the crew’s voice of discipline, said. “WHAT ARE THEY? HOW MANY? ARE THEY OURS?”

“FOCKE-WULF 190’S, SIR. TEN... NO TWELVE. HERE THEY COME!”

Tooney went for his gun grips, but all twelve enemy fighters rolled over and flew by flat out, too rapidly for him to even get away a single round. He cursed under his breath. Gunner training back home over the Gulf of Mexico was never like this. He glanced to the side. They were heading for the low squadrons.

Two more ferocious attacks came and went. Six fighters, in pairs, diving out of the sun, each with spurts of flames flashing off their wing guns. Then nothing. Where’d they go? Tooney relaxed and watched the formation breaking up the puffy clouds. Then he saw something... a strange object coming up swiftly, then

remaining at a distance of two-hundred yards, weaving in and out of the clouds. It was shiny. Small, wide wings. Lump of a cockpit. What the blazes! He couldn't recall any enemy flashcard image like this.

"BALL GUNNER TO PILOT. WE HAVE COMPANY. FIVE O'CLOCK LOW."

"BE SPECIFIC."

"I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE HELL IT IS." He cocked his guns, trying to bear down on the incoming... whatever it was. *Remember, short bursts. Forget it. Too fast.* "LOOK AT IT GO! SHE'S COMING UNDER. THERE IT GOES!"

"TAIL GUNNER TO PILOT. I SAW IT TOO, SIR."

"WHAT WAS IT?"

"HELL IF I KNOW, SIR."

"WHAT'S WITH YOU GUYS? DID IT SHOOT?"

"NO."

"THEN MAYBE SHE'S ONE OF OURS. PILOT TO ALL GUNNERS. KEEP A LOOKOUT FOR ANY MORE."

Tooney pressed his intercom button. "I WILL, SIR."

What the hell was it?

Northern Coast of the Antarctic Peninsula

Inside the small cabin of U-344, the scientist held up his right hand in a Nazi salute, his left hand clutching a copy of Adolf Hitler's bestselling book, *Mein Kampf*. He took a breath of the musty air, mixed with an acid smell of diesel fuel. It had been a long, boring sub trip since leaving Hamburg, except for the stopover in Argentina

to refuel. Those two days in Rio was something, even for a married man like him.

“With your left hand on the divine word, you will read the oath from the sheet, please,” the sub skipper explained, holding up a typed piece of paper for the scientist to read.

It seemed odd to the scientist to be initiated by such a young man. The sub skipper – Manfred Stoeller – was, maybe, thirty. If that. Twenty-five or twenty-six was more like it.

The scientist cleared his throat and began. *“I, Otto Bauer, of my own free will and accord, and under the threat of my own death, solemnly and sincerely swear that I will always secretly hail and henceforth never reveal the cherished mysteries of the Order of the Knights of National Socialism and our ruler, the Commander Fuehrer, to the profane, those who are not chosen to stand by us in our global struggle. I furthermore promise and swear that I will protect any and every fellow blood brother of the Order of the Knights of National Socialism from the profane who seek to pervert or destroy our hallowed Order so help me the most excellent and worshipful lord of this world. Hail Commander Fuehrer and his divine wisdom.”*

Stoeller snatched the sheet from the scientist as they exchanged glances. “Otto Bauer, you are now a brother to the first degree of the Order of the Knights of National Socialism. Welcome to the elite fraternity.”

“Thank you.”

The two whiskered men bowed to each other, clicking their heels. The sub skipper reached into a desk drawer, pulled out a shiny medallion, the size of a large coin, and gave it to Bauer. The scientist fingered it. It was heavy, made of gold. Engraved on it was an ancient Roman soldier on horseback, with sword in hand, holding a Swastika flag, above it the letters KNS.

“Thank you, Lieutenant Stoeller.”

“And, of course, this.” Stoeller carefully handed over a bright red sash. Embroidered on it was a black swastika on a white circle. “Wear them on your person when you meet secretly with other brothers of the Order.”

“I will be delighted, Lieutenant Stoeller.”

“Remember, I shall return in three months. At that time I will take you on an extraordinary journey.”

“Where, may I dare ask?”

“Under the Antarctic icecap.”

“*Under* the icecap? Are you serious?”

“Quite serious. Keep that to yourself. It’s your first closely-guarded secret of the Order. So is Neuschwanbenland.”

“What is that?”

“The Fatherland’s territory already staked out here. Now, you must go. Your party on the surface awaits you. Heil Hitler.”

* * * *

For centuries, men only suspected that Antarctica existed. The Romans and early Greeks wrote of it. The Romans called it *Terra incognita australis*, meaning

unknown southern land. New Zealand tribes spoke of the great white land to the south. In the early nineteenth century, whalers of many countries combed the nearby waters, but kept their hunting grounds secret. Then in 1838, United States Navy Lieutenant Charles Wilkes saw enough of the region to confirm that the Antarctic did exist, and in fact was a massive continent of ice, snow, and murderous weather. In 1911, Norwegian explorers reached the center of the great landmass, and hence were the first to stand on the South Pole. Then, after thirty years of expeditions conducted by various countries, rumors leaked out in 1940 that the unknown continent contained important minerals. The Germans were there to see if the rumors were true.

It was a sharp change for Otto Bauer, going from the depths of the chugging, diesel-powered submarine to the startling outside. *Why here?* he thought, as he and the sailor left the sub behind and began to row the rubber raft to the nearby shore under a gray overcast.

Outfitted in fur-lined parkas, pants, boots, and mittens, they were dressed for the conditions. It was a few degrees below zero. The water was calm, not a breath of wind. The shore was shrouded in a ground mist. *Couldn't they find a warmer place to dig? Like Africa?* Lots of minerals in Africa. Tons of them. He didn't want to come here. But one part of him welcomed the challenge. Better than the rubble and ashes of beleaguered Germany. After a short time, the scientist flipped down his hood and looked out upon the glacial waters of the Antarctic Ocean, intermingled with a few large

chunks of flat ice. Bauer shot a glance back to the open water where U-344 was fast disappearing in the fog, his last link to the Fatherland severed.

Fifty yards from shore, the scientist could make out patches of bare rock shimmering through the mist. The stark wasteland gripped him, leaving him empty. This was awful country. For a moment his mind flashed to home, then von Braun at Peenemunde, and finally his two Arab horses boarded away in Switzerland, in a safe haven. He jerked his head at the sound of a shout that drifted across the water. A figure appeared, waving. To the far right, up from the water, was a jeep. The sailor waved back. They continued rowing, closer and closer to land, their breath steaming in the frigid air. Now in clear, shallow water, Bauer saw rocks below the surface. They pulled onto thick gravel. Bauer looked about. To his surprise, he managed to identify some lichens and mosses a few feet away. Life! There was plant life here.

“Thank you,” the scientist said to his rower, steering onto shore.

“Good luck.” The sailor handed the two pieces of heavy gear to Bauer, then took to the icy waters once again with a splash.

“Heil Hitler.”

“Heil Hitler!” the sailor replied, enthusiastically.

Bauer turned to the figure he had seen earlier. He was a stout man, full-bearded face, with hardened, wind-burned skin. A man his age. This was more like it, thought the scientist. Someone past forty. At last, someone who remembered vividly Germany before

Hitler, not like the wet-behind-the-ears kids on the sub.
“Herr Raeder? Wilhelm Raeder?”

“Yes. Otto Bauer?”

“At your service, Herr Raeder.”

“How is my friend, Werhner?” The man was well-spoken, his voice as clean and sharp as the Antarctic air.

“Excellent. He sends his regards with a bottle of French wine – 1934.”

“Ah, the best. Good old Wernher.”

They shook hands first, then broke into abbreviated Nazi salutes.

Raeder smiled. “Welcome to summer in the Antarctic.”

“Thank you.”

“It is twenty-four degrees Fahrenheit. One of our warmer days this week. Two weeks ago, the thermometer reached forty.”

Bauer grinned. “In that case, Herr Raeder, I should have brought my swimsuit.”

“Don’t worry,” Raeder had to laugh. “We’ve got extras, should you require one. Hand me your bags. By the way, Otto, we use only first names here. And we don’t salute.”

In the jeep, during the six-kilometer jaunt to camp, Raeder, the chief geologist of the German mineral expedition to Antarctica, filled Bauer in, as he drove slowly over the tracks he had made fifteen minutes before. “This time of year – the summer – is more conducive to mining, and we’ve been taking advantage of it. We’ve uncovered a huge deposit of coal, and traces of oil, copper, lead, zinc. However, many of the deposits

are low-grade. Another drawback is drilling through the ice, snow, and rock. We've had heavy-duty equipment sent to us by cargo ship a week ago. We're already using it. We're progressing much faster now."

"What about light metals? Magnesium? Aluminum?"

"Nothing... yet. But we're still looking."

Bauer nodded, disappointed at the lackluster news. Precious light metals in Antarctica still sounded too far-fetched to him.

Raeder drove through the mountain pass, into a flat lowland of white, nestled between a sharp ridge. "There she is. Camp Berlin."

Bauer put his binoculars to his eyes. His throat tightened, taking it all in. "*Mein Gott!*" The scientist was amazed. Clustered together like a small town were tents and clapboard structures of various sizes. Two tents supported Swastika flags. Then his eyes fell on what appeared to be... telephone poles!

"We have our own power station. The big hut in the middle. Shortwave radio, electricity, oil heating, all the conveniences of home. Up there, in the hills to the right, is one part of our drilling operation."

Bauer observed the ridge, returning his view to Camp Berlin itself. "Quite the place," was all he could say until they drove the last two kilometers to the site.

Reader slammed on the brakes in the center of the huts, below a large sign on a four-by-four post that read *SOUTH POLE 2,565 KILOMETERS*. "Are you hungry, Otto?"

"Yes, I do believe I am."

“Out we go. I’ll get someone to settle you in. Then I’ll join you for a meal before we set off to our first drilling site.”

“*Mein Gott!*” Bauer said for the second time, looking around, as a welcoming entourage of bearded men appeared from a hut, dressed in shirtsleeves, breath steaming in the polar air.

CHAPTER THREE

Berlin – January 18

It was a massive underground complex below the Chancellory, bursting with eight hundred people – typists, cooks, chauffeurs, secretaries, orderlies, aides, and advisors. Constructed to last centuries, it contained toilets, running water, small apartments, offices, dining rooms, and conference halls, all protected by six-foot-thick concrete walls. With pride, Adolf Hitler named it the Fuehrerbunker. Here, Hitler would make his stand with his faithful, living like a party of bats.

Martin Bormann entered his fifteen-square-foot office of cold, gray concrete. Today was his third day in the Fuehrerbunker. He had come off a comfortable night's rest, and had been sleeping soundly since his week-long trip to see his wife Gerda. Beneath a large framed picture of Hitler staring down at him, Bormann began his day by ripping the previous sheet off the day calendar on his desk. He looked around. Things were finally getting organized. Files put away. Boxes unpacked. He hated confusion.

Bormann was content with the layout of the department. He had organized it his way, down to the last detail. He had three doors built in which to come and go. One of the doors opened into Josef Goebbels's office, now empty, but soon to be occupied. That was perfect for Bormann. He'd keep an eye on the propaganda minister, the little mole, so he couldn't get too close to Hitler. The second door opened onto the telephone exchange and communications center, where Bormann could carefully screen all the messages to and from the bunker. The third door led to the conference room where all of Hitler's meetings – arranged by none other than Bormann – took place. Hitler's nearby private bunker contained eighteen rooms, complete with his own telephone exchange, powerhouse, washrooms, and a separate room for his dog, Blondi, and her pup, Wolf. Here, underground, Hitler once again was content to let Bormann deal with the people.

Bormann leafed through the paperwork on his desk. Next door the powerhouse diesel engine, which supplied the ventilation and electrical systems for the entire bunker, banged away, a constant clatter that Bormann forced himself to get used to. Too bad nothing could be done about the stale air.

Bormann looked up. His secretary, a member of his staff for three years, stood at the door. He smiled. "Good morning, Fraulein Krueger."

"Good morning, Herr Reichsleiter." The pretty, thirty-year-old Else Krueger was a professional, all utterly business with her superior. "I have a message for you

from Reichmarshall Goering. He will be arriving at the Fuehrerbunker at two this afternoon to see the Fuehrer.”

“Thank you, Fraulein Krueger.” Bormann smiled. *Ah, Herr Meier.*

“You are welcome.”

“Anything else?”

“No, Herr Reichsleiter. That is all.”

She turned to leave. Bormann watched her. She was the one woman on his staff whom he hadn't fondled at work or slept with at night, because he knew she was one who wouldn't put up with such advances. For that he actually respected his secretary. She was one of only three women he regarded graciously. The other two were Gerda and his mistress, the actress Manja Behrens, whom he had spent a night with on his way back to Berlin after the week with Gerda.

* * * *

The two superbly-uniformed men walked in the Chancellory garden, above the bunker, away from sentries patrolling the entrance.

Reichmarshall Hermann Goering was a flag without a pole. Hitler's official successor since 1940, Goering was a leader on paper only of an air force that barely existed except for a few airplanes and a handful of untrained pilots. Tired, shaky, considerably thinner in the last year or so, he was an old fifty-two, a heavy drinker, and a drug addict. He was in the Fuehrer's doghouse since the Luftwaffe had lost the Battle of Britain in 1940. And it

never got better after that. Following a poor showing on the Russian Front in 1942 and 1943, Hitler wanted to hang Goering along with his entire Luftwaffe of fliers.

The Reichmarshall looked distraught during the walk with Bormann. Once the epitome of the socially prominent, once reckless, loud, egotistical, brutal, and extremely obese, Goering was only a crust of a man now with a bad hip that had bothered him since the Great War. "May God have mercy on our souls," he had told Hitler when war broke out six years ago, when Germany was riding high. The war's effects had carved yet more jagged lines in his placid face. He knew he never should have said what he did to the German press in 1939. "Not a single bomb will fall on the Rhur. If an enemy plane reaches the Rhur, my name is not Hermann Goering. You can call me Meier!" RAF bombers had not only reached and bombed the Rhur repeatedly in the last three years, but they had razed Berlin too. Now, in early 1945, only one thing remained constant. Herr Meier still insisted on wearing his lavish, comical uniforms, as was the case today with his white battle dress full of shiny medals under his open greatcoat.

Bormann listened impatiently to Goering's complaints of his sore hip and sorry state of the Luftwaffe and the war before he finally spoke out of desperation to the Reichmarshall. "Our only hope is that crazy fighter-interceptor of yours, the V-4."

"The V-4?"

"Yes. What the Allied papers call the Foo Fighter."

Goering came to an abrupt stop by the garden wall, scarred and damaged by the winter Allied bombing. “What are you talking about?” he blinked in disbelief, his breath steaming in the cool air.

“The latest secret weapon. I know the codename. *Projekt Equinox*. The combined effort of Messerschmitt and the Peenemunde staff. Isn’t that what you came to speak to the Fuehrer about?”

Goering swallowed, unable to speak. His hands, clutching his Reichmarshall baton, twitched slightly as he stood.

“You can’t hide it from me,” Bormann continued. “I have pictures in my safe taken inside the underground factory in the Thuringia mountains.” Bormann did up another button on his coat to keep the cold out. “They show the radio-controlled models. Your operational tests, I’ve heard, have been quite successful. Your interceptors have shot down American and British bombers in the last two days. And what is this new pilot-controlled prototype at Peenemunde? I am also familiar with Camp Berlin. So there!”

“Then you do—” Goering stood open-jawed, drawing back a step.

“Close your damn mouth and listen to me, you fool.”

“How dare you!”

“We need each other, Goering. The war is as good as over. A blind man can see it.”

“That can’t be any more apparent. A quick end to the war is inevitable,” Goering admitted. “It’s only months away. April or May, the latest.”

“Then we agree.”

“Yes, of course.”

“We have to get out of this mess. That’s why we created our fraternity in the first place. Certain people will want our technology. *Americans*. May I suggest a solution?”

“I’m listening.”

“You and me, Goering, our safety in another country, in exchange for the blueprints to every Nazi secret weapon, except the V-4.”

“Why not the V-4? I thought you just said it was our only hope.”

“We hold it in reserve, to see if they negotiate without it. We give them the window dressing first. We spring the V-4 on them at the last minute, only if we have to. The less people see it, the better. Are you with me?”

“You and me? An odd combination, wouldn’t you say, after all these years?”

Bormann knew what Goering was driving at. They had never come remotely close to being friends. Without question, they had loathed each other. Bormann would now go to work on the Reichmarshall’s Achilles heel – his pride. “That was the past. Yes, Goering. You and me. No one else. Not Himmler. Not Goebbels. Not the Fuehrer. They are not members of the Order. Not anyone else. Too many cooks spoil the broth. I can’t trust anyone else. We – you and I – see things in a brighter light. We are the only two with a clear sense of self-preservation.”

“Then you need me, Bormann?” Goering asserted, with contempt. “You actually trust me. Isn’t that lovely. A peaceful coexistence within the High Command.”

“Yes. A common course. Let’s resolve our differences. Forget the past. Haven’t I done so by creating our Order?”

“I have the copies of the original blueprints. I can negotiate myself. Why do I need you?” Goering said, testing Bormann.

“I thought you might say that. Yes, indeed, you may have the Luftwaffe inventions. But I have my Swiss connections.”

“So do I. All of us in the High Command do.”

“But my banker in Zurich knows Allen Dulles of the OSS quite well.”

“The hell you say? Dulles?”

“It’s true. The same Allen Dulles who would like nothing better than an Allied-Nazi alliance to fend off the Russians. The same Dulles who gave us the Russian plans for Europe.”

“How do you know this?”

“Believe me, I know it. Everything the Fuehrer knows, I know. Dulles was also at one time the legal advisor to the Anglo-German Schroeder Bank, before he became the OSS Director in Switzerland.”

“The Schroeder Bank?”

“Yes.”

“I.S. Filberg’s bank?”

“That is correct, yes. Our own German industrial cartel, I.S. Filberg, who went begging, hat in hand, to

Wall Street to finance our National Socialist movement in the first place. And remember, it was a Schroeder group that merged with a Rockefeller group before the war to become the Schroeder Rockefeller Company. Our American connection may come through for us once again, when we need them most.”

“Can you vouch for your banker?”

“Yes, of course I can.”

“Even so, how do you know the OSS will wish to deal with us?”

“Oh, they will. They’d be fools not to. We have too much on Dulles and other Americans who’ve been secretly supplying us with oil and aluminum since the war began.”

Goering twirled his baton, resting it by his right leg. “How can you be sure it will work out as you say? How badly do the Americans want our inventions?”

“Basic greed on their part. They don’t want the Russians to get what we have. In addition, my banker is, allow me to say, persuasive.”

“Let me think this through. I’ll get back to you.”

“Don’t take too long. Let me stress the reality that our world is getting smaller every day. The Allies are seeing to it.”

“Do you think I don’t know that?” Goering huffed.

They walked to the gate leading out to the rubble street. Together, they raised their right hand in the Nazi salute, then placed the same hand to their heart... a pledge of support as clandestine brothers in the second degree of the Order of the Knights of National Socialism.

“Blood brother, Herr Bormann.”

It was quite comical to the Reichsleiter, who knew that each one was out to bleed whatever they could from the arrangement. “Blood brother, Herr Goering.”

“Good day, Bormann,” Goering said, his face hard.

Bormann watched Goering leave by way of the potholed street to his limousine across the road. The secret fraternity initiated by Bormann in August, 1944 was starting to pay off. After the Allied D-Day landing in early June of that year, Bormann was quick to predict that the end was very near. Pulling his old adversary, Herr Meier, into the group was a strategic move. The V-4 was under Goering’s umbrella. Bormann needed the nervous wreck of a man. For the present. The trap had been laid. Goering was a bigger idiot than Bormann first thought.

Bormann saw that there were many possible places in which to hide out in the next few months. Argentina. Neuschwabenland. America. He only had to take his pick.

For the present, back to Adolf the Great. His drugs. His steady stream of chocolates. And his tantrums.

Southern England

Cloudy weather over the continent had grounded the operation for three days. But not tonight. Clear skies were expected.

The fighter pilot flicked the mike switch to the side of his oxygen mask to “on.”

“SILVER SIX-THREE TO EMERALD TOWER. OK TO TAKE-OFF?”

“EMERALD TOWER TO SILVER SIX-THREE, YOU ARE CLEARED TO TAKE-OFF. GOOD HUNTING.”

The pilot pushed the dual throttles to maximum, watching the revolutions climb on the brightly-lit panel at eye-level. Twenty-five hundred horsepower from his twin Merlin engines roared in his ears.

He released the brakes.

A kick in the pants... and they were off in the twilight. The pilot glanced right to his navigator in the seat tucked against his, then lifted the Mosquito fighter off the runway. He brought the landing gear up and banked the machine east.

In minutes, Bevens and Solomon were over the North Sea, heading towards Germany. As a night intruder, their mission was to check out and aggravate one of the last fighter bases in Germany – near Hamburg – that was still harassing the Royal Air Force bombers on their nightly raids of the Fatherland. And it had to be done – again – before the bombers came over tonight on a raid to Berlin.

Part-way over the North Sea, the pilot released the fifty-gallon drop tanks and went to the wing tanks. Night had fallen. They climbed to 2,500 feet. He could hear a buzzing in his headset. Enemy scanners were already on them.

* * * *

With a small flashlight, British navigator Bill Bevens studied the maps on his knees. He glanced up. According to his calculations via his panel equipment, the checkpoint should be coming up in six minutes.

“TURN PORT THREE DEGREES,” he said into his mask to Canadian pilot, Reggie Solomon. Masks on, complete with the earphones, was the best form of communication with the constant roar of the engines around them.

“YOU BET.”

“CHECKPOINT IN TWO MINUTES, TWENTY SECONDS.”

“ROGER.”

Solomon nosed the fighter down to the water line. He would be coming under the coastal radar at zero altitude, north of Bremerhaven. The German coast came up quickly... and flashed beneath. Then he brought the stick back, sending the fighter into a stiff climb. At 2,000 feet, he leveled off, then turned southeast on his navigator's directions.

Hamburg

The supervisor attached to Zerstoror Unit 22 peered over the shoulder of his radar technician inside the darkened room. The two watched the pulsing, green blip and the green wide-sweeping arm on the screen.

“There it is, Herr Leyberger,” the technician said, recording the time with a pencil in his log. “In our sector. By that speed and the size of the target, I would have to say it's none other than an intruder Mosquito.”

The supervisor smiled, bending over the glowing machine. "Let's give him a little surprise. I will alert Loebitz. A single interceptor should be sufficient."

"I agree, Herr Leyberger. One on one."

"Yes, it will be rather *sporting*."

Northern Germany

A winding river, attached to a tear-drop shaped piece of water glistened at them in the moonlight. "THERE'S THE LAKE," Bevens said.

"GOT IT."

"TURN FIVE DEGREES STARBOARD. WE SHOULD BE OVER DAAKAN FAIRLY SOON."

It took two minutes to see landing lights. Solomon banked left in a tight circle, nose down.

"WE GOT ONE COMING IN TO LAND."

Solomon nodded. His navigator was right. What appeared to be an ME-109 was in the circuit and approaching the downwind leg. Solomon flicked his gun safety switch to the firing position and gave chase. Solomon raced across the field and caught the German fighter from the side with a burst of fire. Whether he connected or not, he'd never know. He kept his finger on the button, aiming for the other fighters on the dispersal track.

He hit one and it exploded into flames. Then Daakan airfield plunged into darkness. A searchlight beam blinked on. Solomon banked low over the base, turned, and fired at the light. It went out. Solomon climbed and headed west. Mission accomplished.

Then... a flash of light flew by overhead, heading in the opposite direction.

“WHAT WAS THAT?”

“DON’T KNOW. A FALLING STAR, MAYBE.”

“I DON’T THINK SO.”

Banking the Mosquito to starboard, Solomon and his navigator both watched a glowing orange light streak off at a tremendous speed.

“I SAY, LOOK AT THAT BUGGER GO!”

“WAIT... IT’S TURNING.”

Solomon looked over his shoulder. It was no falling star. It had to be man-made. “WHATEVER IT IS, IT KNOWS WE’RE HERE.” Solomon advanced the throttles to a healthy four hundred miles per hour.

It was not enough.

The light came up from behind and overtook the Mosquito in seconds, then raced ahead of them as if they were standing in mid-air. Solomon took a few shots at it, and missed. It was much too quick.

“WHAT THE—” Solomon gulped into his mask. He had always thought the Mosquito to be the fastest fighter in both air forces, British and German. Not so. Was this thing a fighter? Of course it was a fighter. What else was it? Maybe it was one of those German jets. But even the jets couldn’t be this fast.

Solomon banked to port, the direction of home.

England.

The light appeared out of nowhere and headed right for them. Nose to nose! From a hundred yards away, it

flew straight up and disappeared into a layer of clouds, turning the sky above them a dusty orange.

Solomon never let up on the throttles.

“HERE IT COMES AGAIN!” the navigator warned, glancing over his shoulder at the light falling out of the clouds in a tight U-turn. “HEAD FOR THE DECK!”

It was on their tail in a flash. A hundred yards back, it slowed down... then sped up, letting loose a spray at the Mosquito’s engine exhaust, before darting straight up into the clouds again.

The British fighter disintegrated, spreading molten debris over enemy territory. Bevens and Solomon died instantly.

Hamburg

The technician watched with childlike excitement as the unidentified blip disappeared off the radar screen, leaving only the wide, pulsing, green sweep.

“It’s gone, Herr Leyberger,” he sighed, hiding a grin. “I take it to mean one thing.”

The supervisor walked over. “I know. For them the war is over. I will return the interceptor to base. Well done, Wolfgang.”

“Thank you, Herr Leyberger. I wish I was there to see it.”

“Me, too.”

CHAPTER FOUR

Antarctic – January 30

Otto Bauer savored a swig of hot, strong coffee from his glass mug inside the wooden hut, as he and a younger associate studied the lead samples brought to them off the ridge.

“Still too low grade,” Bauer sighed, magnifying glass to his eye. He scratched his beard, now nearly as full as the others in the camp.

“But it is improving in quality as we drill deeper in the rock.”

Bauer agreed, sniffing. He was fighting off a cold. “What depth are we now?”

“One hundred meters.”

“We have to go even deeper, or else go farther inland and start all over again.”

“Where there’s more ice to drill through?” the associate asked. “I don’t expect Wilhelm to agree to that.”

“No, I suppose not.” Bauer swallowed more coffee, grunting, sniffing, wiping his nose with a handkerchief. Two weeks and barely anything worthwhile removed

from the ground. He had to be patient. *Do your duty*, he remembered.

The phone rang.

“Otto, it’s for you,” said a third man inside the hut.

The scientist walked over to the desk phone opposite the dirty window. “Hello.”

“Otto, it’s Wilhelm.”

“Yes, Wilhelm,” Bauer replied. “I hope *you* have some good news, better than the samples so far.”

“I do.” Wilhelm Raeder sounded excited. “Our number two search squad reported in.”

“Where have they been? We haven’t heard from them for two days.”

“Radio malfunction, and a bad storm inland, so they said. Nevertheless, they found something worthwhile.”

“And what did they find?”

“Won’t you be surprised.”

“I’m beginning to think that I will. Are you going to keep me in suspense?”

“Get dressed. Warm. We are going on a journey. Be ready in five minutes,” Raeder ordered, with a voice of authority.

* * * *

The journey was slow over the dry snow. The wind blew, but not hard enough to hamper visibility to any great degree. Raeder drove, navigating by a large compass and radio communication with his search team. After a slow thirty kilometers into the interior, Raeder slammed on the brakes of the canvas-covered jeep beside another

covered jeep. They were in a wide, flat clearing several kilometers across.

The driver rolled down his window and gestured towards a rise to the right. "Another kilometer or more. That way."

"Right."

They lumbered on until the driver drew his vehicle to a halt. "Here it is," the driver said, proudly.

Bauer stepped out onto mushy, wet snow and gazed upon a steaming pool of water approximately ten feet by fifteen feet. He bent down. The pool was clear, rocks at the bottom. The air over it warm, almost hot. He wiped his nose.

Reader followed behind. "Hot springs."

"I can see that." Bauer shook his head, sniffing. "Unbelievable."

"Yes, isn't it. In the Antarctic."

"No, I mean, you brought me all the way out here to show me some damn hot springs?"

Raeder smiled. "Yes and no." The geologist went to the rear of the jeep, threw off the canvas cover, and returned with four crystal glasses and the bottle of wine that Bauer had brought from Germany. "Otto, I learned a long time ago that one must always keep a sense of humor in addition to a sense of reality. With that in mind, we celebrate."

"Why?" Bauer replied, confused.

"Time to break open Wernher's French wine. Boys, jump in. You too, Otto. Might do wonders for your cold and your mood."

“I hope to hell it does.”

They all stripped naked, threw their heavy clothes on the warm rocks and eased into the hot water, which had to be over a hundred degrees. Soon they were squatting in a pool up to their chests.

Raeder poured the wine. “A toast... to our luck.”

They clinked glasses, and drank.

“What luck is that?” Bauer asked, licking his lips, the dark, red wine stinging his throat. The combination of steamy water and powerful wine was actually clearing his sinuses. “Excellent, I must admit.”

“Don’t you see?” Raeder answered. “This must have been a volcanic region at one time, thousands or millions of years ago. I wonder what’s under all this ice?”

“Or perhaps,” Bauer interrupted, thinking of what the sub skipper had said about the trip under the continent, “it still is volcanic. Far beneath the earth. Oftentimes, cold areas can have the hottest springs. Iceland, for example.”

“Greenland, too,” Raeder agreed. “I saw them. I was there in 1939 and 1941, before the Americans forced us out and built their air bases.” Raeder dunked his head under the water, then popped up, massaging his hand through his slicked hair. “Otto, as a geologist I know that where there’s hot springs, there’s minerals. Sometimes close to the surface. We might be on to something. We’re going to have to move our drilling team. Right here.”

Bauer pondered Raeder's assumption, staring into the wine. "Now I see."

"Drink up, my friend!" Raeder laughed. "Drink up!"

"I just might do that."

London

Alone in the projection room, Wesley Hollinger read the OSS dispatches – intercepted radio signals – brought to his attention. Obviously the Germans had added something to their already-potent arsenal. Loebitz airfield had a new fighter and were in direct communication with Hamburg. New callsigns and codenames had been exercised. But, strange... no radio communication with the pilots, or at least not recorded. Very bizarre.

Hollinger tossed the dispatches on the seat next to him. He stood up to press the button on the side of the projector to start the film that he would see for the first time, a short piece that had been smuggled out of Germany. He shut the room light off and let the film roll. The footage was amazingly clear, with sound, and in color! No need to act surprised. The Germans were highly advanced in such technology. Hollinger immediately recognized the rocket-powered Messerschmitt ME-163 Komet, one of the most radical and futuristic of German aerial designs. Single-seated and single-engined. According to sources, it was capable of reaching the speed of sound in level flight. The ME-163 was a short fighter, Hollinger could tell right off by the pilot standing beside it. It was also quite ugly, like a lop-sided torpedo. But looks meant nothing to the American

agent once he saw the aircraft take off down the grass strip on its jettisoned trolley at a fantastic speed, smoke belching from its exhaust. It then climbed nearly straight up to the clouds... in seconds!

Hollinger gaped at the screen. Dorwin was right about one thing in his assessment of the situation in Germany. The Germans were years ahead of the Allies in aeronautical research.

What else did they have?

Werra, Germany

Heinrich Himmler strutted alongside the fighter production line, the nervous SS commandant in charge of the underground facility closely at his heels like an obedient puppy, eager to please. In the midst of the noise of construction – banging, drilling, shouts from supervisors – the commandant methodically explained the work at each station.

Together they viewed the initial stages of the strange wing formation, the landing gear, the armament, and the center section of the Messerschmitt V-4 Experimental Series 1-1a fighter-interceptor. Following the line, they saw how the pieces were sent on rails to the next area where they were riveted in place. The rest, up the line, were finishing touches. The Reichsfuehrer and the commandant walked to the end and out the mountain tunnel entrance guarded by six tall SS guards. Outside, another SS guard was beating a skinny, pale man with a whip.

“Does this happen often, Herr Colonel?” Himmler’s tone was matter-of-fact.

The commandant, Colonel Geinns, swallowed hard and stared at the man in the sinister black uniform and high polished boots. “The beatings?”

“Yes, the beatings. What did you think I meant?”

“Yes... well... sometimes we do have to... discipline our workers, Herr Reichsfuehrer. We have to. However, conditions—”

“You had an escape last month. One of the Polish prisoners.”

The commandant tried to explain. “Yes, true, but—”

“The Fuehrer has placed a high priority on *Projekt Equinox*. Let me remind you, Herr Colonel, this is a top-secret installation. There will be no other escapes.”

“Yes, of course, Herr Reichsfuehrer. But we caught the prisoner in thirty minutes. Since then, we have beefed up the lighting outside the entrance and have constructed a much higher wire fence.” He sighed. “However, I must point out that the conditions are not the best here, Herr Reichsfuehrer.”

“What do you mean?”

“Our food supply for the prisoners is decreasing,” the commandant explained. “Fresh water is scarce. Very few supplies are getting through, even to the guards. Word is that our trains are being shot up en route by Allied fighters. We cannot go on like this.”

“You’re not the only one... feeling the pressure. We must all make sacrifices at this time for the Fuehrer and the Fatherland.”

The commandant turned away for a moment to watch the guard whip and kick the worker into the tunnel, as the other guards chuckled with laughter. “Yes, of course, Herr Reichsfuehrer.”

“Stop that prisoner!” Himmler demanded.

From forty feet away, the commandant deftly passed the order to the guard, who swung the prisoner around by the scruff of his neck.

“What do you want with him, Herr Reichsfuehrer?” the commandant asked.

“What did he do to deserve the beating?”

“What did he do?” the commandant called out to the guard.

“He was caught sleeping on the line, Herr Colonel,” the guard answered.

Himmler sighed. “Shoot him.”

“Herr Reichsfuehrer?”

“I said shoot him! Now! Are you deaf? You must set an example for the others.”

“Shoot him!” the commandant ordered the guard.

The SS guard’s reaction was instantaneous. He grabbed the terrified prisoner by his coat and dragged him into the open.

“No! No!” the prisoner shouted, falling to his knees. “Please, no!”

Himmler turned from the entrance and walked away with the colonel. “These... flying tops are reeking havoc on the enemy bombers are they?”

The commandant cleared the bile in his throat. "Yes, they are, Herr Reichsfuehrer. I am told so by the Luftwaffe High Command."

Himmler nodded, approvingly. "Do you believe the Third Reich will win the war, Herr Colonel?"

"Certainly, Herr Reichsfuehrer. No one will conquer the German spirit."

Himmler slipped the commandant an uneasy glance, as two pistol shots rang out behind them. "It would be wise to quit your complaining. Loyalty, unconditional loyalty, is the true quality of a man. The highest of duties."

"Yes, Herr Reichsfuehrer."

"Nonetheless, your men have performed well, and so have you, despite the escape."

"You are too kind, Herr Reichsfuehrer."

"Yes, I am. Goodbye, Colonel Geinns. Heil Hitler."

"Heil Hitler!" The commandant saluted smartly, snatching a quick glance over to the dead prisoner lying on the ground, shot through the head.

Himmler spun on his heels and moved off to his waiting limousine.

* * * *

On the airplane, returning to his command post north of Berlin, Heinrich Himmler jotted in his diary, *Projekt Equinox last chance before drastic measures are taken.*

Weary, the Reichsfuehrer closed his eyes, and leaned back into the seat, while the stripped-down Junkers passenger plane continued to climb over the Thuringia

Mountains. One of the most powerful men in what was left of the Nazi regime, the Reichsfuehrer was stretched to the limit these dark days. He was the head of the Gestapo state police, and the SS, Hitler's personal guard. He controlled all German domestic and foreign Intelligence and most of the concentration camps. He was the ultimate military power in the northern German zone, Norway, Scandinavia, and Holland, as well as the chief of the Replacement Army and the newly-established Army Group Vistula fighting forces. He was Hitler's perfect *yes-man*. He followed Hitler's orders with no sense of guilt. If the Fuehrer wanted all Germans with surnames beginning with the letter Y be shot, then Himmler would do it. No questions asked. He could give a man dinner one night, laugh and joke with him, then issue a death warrant for him the following morning, with no qualms.

At this time the Nazi regime had no new territory to conquer and imprison people against their will. They hadn't for three years. The Nazis were on the run. The Allies were closing in from all sides. Contrary to what he told the commandant, Himmler knew the war was lost. The situation was in peril. The radio-controlled fighters of *Projekt Equinox* would not win the war. Had they come out earlier, combined with the rest of the secret weapon arsenal, then maybe. Water under the bridge at this stage of the game. And to think his SS could have been the breeding bulls for the future master race of Aryan purity – tall, muscular, blonde-haired, blue-eyed specimens of loyalty and honor who swore an oath

before God that they would give absolute allegiance to the Fuehrer and be ready to lay down their life for their master.

No more.

Deep in his own solitude, Himmler considered his options. There weren't many. One and only one came to mind. He would have to seek peace with the West. On his own.

**That's the end of the sampler. We hope you enjoyed it.
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Historical fiction author Daniel Wyatt is Canadian, born and raised on the prairies of Saskatchewan. He now resides with his wife and two children in Burlington, Ontario, thirty miles outside Toronto.

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A big baseball fan, Wyatt enjoys collecting Detroit Tigers memorabilia. In the summer months, he coaches a local fastball team.