

The Guard of Honour

Guenther Brandenmeyer is leading a long column of Waffen (weapons) SS down the Unter den Linden. It's a military parade; Waffen-SS, Regular Wehrmacht and a heap of tanks. The Brown Shirts are political of course, once a private army, now Hitler's; they are a tad too political to march. Hitler is showing off to Berliners the military side of his persona. They are not impressed. Although the last big stoush was fought in France and Belgium, the older Berliners remember the hardships of rationing and the loss of so many of their young men. Besides, this hastily assembled parade has Benito Mussolini on the reviewing stand. Old Benny is a chancer of the first order and although his armed forces reflect the very best effort of designers, the world knows that they haven't shown much form in the fighting in North Africa.

Anyway, the uniformed, but totally off-duty Brown Shirts are in raptures at the parade and applaud and shout their enthusiasm. Guenther, cleaning up his mental language says to himself, *'What the wuck am I doing here? Here I am, a Doctor of Philosophy, educated in three countries, totally bilingual, a qualified accountant to boot and again here I am, goosestepping with the best of them, carbine at the port and wishing that I'm anywhere else in the world but here. Here I am, about to present arms, eyes right, etc to a demented gangster and his Italian huckster mate.'* But the little nagging voice of conscience reminds him that without the financial support of the old Junker family in East Prussia, he would never have seen the big wide world outside and experienced the wealth of experience that their Universities have provided.

Guenther's strength and his weakness stems from his physical build. At six feet five inches in his stocking feet, without an ounce of fat on him and being blue-eyed and blonde to boot, he is the archetypical Aryan. This is exactly why a man who should logically be in military intelligence, utilising his university trained brain, is toting a carbine along Berlin's main drag. Old Goebbels, a publicity freak without parallel, spotted his resume quite by accident and drafted him straight into the fairly recently formed Waffen-SS, and truth to tell, in his black and silver uniform, he is the impressive soldier personified. His graphic image has appeared on innumerable photographs illustrating and denoting the new Germany of Hitler.

Chapter 2

A few days later, Guenther is in England sparking his old girlfriend from his university days there. She is the organist at the small Church of England, north of Cambridge where he used to sing in the Choir, albeit with another intention in mind. She is a honey and his intention paid off big time when they got together. He has kept in touch since being called up for army service and she is delighted to catch up with him.



Guenther had a bit of trouble getting a leave pass to visit Cambridge, but Goebbels overruled his military boss.

"It's okay, Guenther," he says, "but bearing in mind you are, to some extent, our Aryan trademark, and assuming your girlfriend there is not connected in any way with world Jewry, it's okay for you to have a week there. However, there are

one or two requirements from us, your masters. Firstly, there is some paperwork I want you to take over to our Ambassador there – von Ribbentrop. We will send a bodyguard with you, who will stay with you until that chore is done. Secondly, we want you to wear your Waffen SS uniform sans cap. The Brits at this stage don't know how to take us. We think you in uniform will shake them up and if you don't wear your cap, it will indicate a small degree of informality. They will be even more confused and that's how we want them at the present time. Be very nice and tell them your group is only a small one and that Hitler is really a nice, mild guy; that sort of thing. You are an intelligent and educated man and I'm sure without adding anything further, you can help your nation along in a very influential, but pusillanimous part of the world. Also, it wouldn't hurt to drop a few misleading baits here and there."

"Such as?" Guenther asks.

"Ah.....tell them the new .88mm dual purpose gun isn't performing well and that design work is proceeding on a new .92mm one. Also, that aircraft production is lagging badly and that all this bad publicity over what we are meting out to the Jews is just a passing phase that will soon be phased out. Tell them not to believe all they hear in the distorted French press and so on." He adds, "It's best to brownnose old Ribbentrop a bit, as the Fuhrer is thinking of making him the Foreign Minister of the Reich."

"Does he know foreign affairs?" Guenther asks.

"Hmm..." says Goebbels, "he knows all about wines. He used to sell them for a living, but he hasn't done too badly as Ambassador to England. The Diplomatic people may not go to his shows for his wit and charm, but they certainly go to sample his excellent Rhineland wines."

With all of this in mind, Guenther lands at Lord Erskine's country home to attend his old girlfriend's graduation. It all goes well and he finishes up included in a large dinner party at Henscombe. At the port stage, Erskine fills Guenther's glass and says, "What about the lowdown on what is going on in Germany? We hear just so many stories."

"Hmmm," Guenther says, first sipping his rich port and lighting his long cigar. "It's all largely exaggerated and all this talk of war is froth and bubble. Germany couldn't possibly be well enough equipped for conflict for another three or four years and who knows, Germany or its people have no longing for war and Hitler may by then be out of power or chasing safer agendas. Also, the arms design is hitting a few hurdles (he drops the .88mm sprat) and the potential ally, Italy, has its hands full in dusty old North Africa."

"That's re-assuring," Lord Erskine says. "We can't see any reason for Germany to go to war ourselves. In a way all this loose talk and the army conscription that seems to have scooped you up is rather a nuisance. We were hoping you would come to England and make a match with our Sybil. You seemed a very handsome and compatible pair and England, of course, even at Royalty levels has strong German connections."

"Awkward, Sir," Guenther says. "If the wild rumour that Adolf is to invade England, with my size, I'd be a monty to be drafted into the first invasion barge and that would indeed be very embarrassing to you as a father-in-law, or inversely, if we had married and I'd gone teaching in England, I'd equally, in the event of war, be the first pick by the internment camp people who would scoop me up and lock me away when the first shot was fired." The company laugh.

Erskine says, "I hear that you will be accompanying von Ribbentrop to Monday's Garden Party. We will look forward to linking up with you there."

“How does it all work?” Guenther asks.

“Well, there are set points where guests are told to be, their provenances will be read beforehand and the King and various hangers on will stop at these points to talk with the chosen few. I understand the new King,” he says, (Edward the 8th) “is indeed no Rhodes Scholar and without his paramour, Wallis Simpson, is a bit of a wet blanket. Queen Mary, the Queen Mother, is a stiff old stick, so you won’t get much out of her either. You will need to have some conversation list up your sleeve to avoid collapsing with boredom.”

Guenther laughs. “I’ll do my best,” he promises.

When they rejoin the ladies, Sybil grabs him. “Guenther,” she says, “you simply have to come to church Sunday. We may not see one another for a while.”

“How so?” asks Guenther.

“Hmm, I’ve been offered a post-graduate spot at Harvard and I’m about to take it up at semester start.”

“Sybil,” he says, “wild horses won’t keep me away.”

Dieter, his bodyguard and minder has a car ready for when the dinner party winds up and they speed off to London in the big Mercedes to the German Embassy. Ribbentrop, immaculately dressed, but as wooden-faced as ever, greets him in the study. They have a quiet talk over a bottle of excellent German Hock and a couple of long cigars.

“I hear you are up for the Foreign Ministry back in Berlin,” Guenther says.

“Hah,” he says, “the Fuhrer seems to think that anyone who has travelled or lived abroad is well suited to that job. However, it is a post of tremendous challenge and it’s a great opportunity to serve the Fatherland, so hopefully....., now about tomorrow. What have you been told?”

“Hmm,: says Guenther, “I’ve been told to keep close post on you and to wear my dress uniform without a hat. They haven’t said anything about a monocle.”

Ribbentrop laughs. “I’ll do that bit,” he says. “You could affect a pipe to add to the formality or informality that they want you to project to the stiff-necked old Pommies.”

“Okay,” says Guenther, “I have a pipe with me.”

Ribbentrop gets up and goes to his desk. “Here is a slipper of Jamaican tobacco,” he says. “If you strike up with any of the guests, offer them a fill; it’s very good stuff.”

Thus Guenther, huge and immaculate in his black Waffen-SS uniform with its silver runic collar flashes, is having a relaxed puff on the back lawns and gardens of Buckingham Palace when Lord Halifax, a leading Cabinet light here in England, arrives along. Despite his aristocratic mein, Halifax is a tall, unimpressive man.

‘Gawd,’ thinks Guenther, ‘if this is a possible replacement for poor old Baldwin, God help the sceptred isle.’

Chapter 3

Guenther would have to be the most impressive man on the lawns of this important garden party today. He is a huge man and totally eye-catching in his military uniform. He is standing there in all his immensity when Ribbentrop stiffens.

“En garde,” he says. “Tall poppies in sight; best offer old Baldwin a twist of your baccy.”

The trio approaching are Austen and Neville Chamberlain, with Stanley Baldwin taking point. Old Stanley is squarish to look at, wearing a bowler (*‘at a garden party – God help us,’ Guenther thinks*) and puffing his pipe. Ribbentrop puts his monocle in his eye, shakes hands with all three. Guenther stands up even higher, clicks his heels and gives a mock salute. Baldwin says to Guenther, “I don’t really know much about what is happening in Germany (true enough), but you are certainly a prime example of what, in our minds eye, is the Teutonic man personified.”

Guenther laughs. “Mr Baldwin, Sir, it’s nice of you to say it, but I’m a cream puff underneath. I did think about bringing my nanny along to guide me through the diplomatic niceties.” The three are good enough to laugh.

“A likely story, Oberleutnant,” he says. “We see you up front in many newsreels coming out of Germany. We follow the goings on there very closely.”

Guenther laughs. “So do I,” he says, “but I’m probably just as confused as you are. It will take a time to unfold I think, but the country under Herr Hitler is certainly jumping along.”

“It’s the Jewish question,” Baldwin says. He taps his pipe out. Guenther springs his slipper of shag; Baldwin quite graciously accepts and fills and tamps his old briar. “It’s about the Jews really,” he says as he gets his pipe puffing. “Their treatment is very disquieting.”

Guenther grins. “Really Mr Baldwin? This in a country that, in its biggest county, Yorkshire, passed a law preventing deceased Jews being buried there. They have to be shipped to London.”

“Hmmm,” says Baldwin. “Past time, long passed times.”

“Not really,” says Guenther. “The action in Yorkshire was the same as that taking place in Germany. The locals are very concerned they are being overtaken financially by the Jewish segment. It’s really only a balancing action that will be dropped when a better balance is achieved.”

“Perhaps,” says Baldwin. “You are well informed.”

“By the British, themselves,” says Guenther. “I did a year of my Philosophy Doctorate at Cambridge.”

“I’m impressed,” says Baldwin. “I would like to push the boundaries of this discussion further, but we are about to be pushed along by those following. Mr Churchill and his mate, Brendan Bracken are about to arrive at this spot, so we must move along.”

Churchill arrives; he’s puffing a huge cigar. He observes the niceties with von Ribbentrop and nods at Guenther.

“You’re a big yin,” he says. “I hope your brain power matches your huge physicality.”

Guenther is an educated man and he’s quick with it. He looks down at old Churchill. “I hope, Sir,” he says, “that the same quotation doesn’t apply to you.”

Churchill grunts; he’s not impressed. “Come, Brendan,” he says and they move along.

“Hmmm,” says Ribbentrop, “I’ll think about that exchange. Look sharp now; here comes the King with his constant official companion, Louis Mountbatten. Up ‘til the last war he was or would be Louis Battenberg.”

“Hmmm,” says Guenther. “What’s the skinny on them?”

“Ah...,” he says, “King Teddy is a fool born or a born fool – take your choice. He is a highly social lightweight with a leaning to married or in Mrs Simpson’s case, much married women.”

“And?” says Guenther.

Wooden-faced old von Ribbentrop says, "This, my young friend, is a funny old country. The Church the English subscribe to was founded to allow the much married King Henry VIII to marry and divorce as the whim took him. Now it seems divorce is out of style and it could well be that the present King's light of love may well take him down the gurgler."

"And Louis?" he asks.

"Ah..." says von Ribbentrop, "Nothing more than a very polished chancer. He is courting an heiress at the moment; the heiress to what we think is a Jewish fortune. Goebbels has told me to strike him from the Embassy guest list forthwith."

Guenther looks at the two, now very near them. The King, against all advice, is wearing a very smart pair of suede lace-up moccasins; the sure sign, at least in America, of the homosexual, teamed with a remarkably sober flannel suit. He is a very small man, in fact, thinks Guenther, this chap is no taller than Doctor Goebbels, who is battling to go five feet in his elevated shoes, with a club foot to boot. Tall, saturnine Louis towers over the King and Guenther towers over both of them. Ribbentrop effects the formal introductions; King Teddy gives off strong vibes that he would prefer to be somewhere else, but Mountbatten makes an attempt at conversation. Louis is a bit of a uniform freak and looks hard at Guenther's, just so impressive, Waffen-SS uniform.

"Very impressive," he says, "What do you do in your new and impressive arm?"

"Guenther laughs. "Mainly carry around a carbine and march in parades," he says. "We're big on parades in Deutschland just at the moment, but it keeps me occupied."

Louis transfers his attention to von Ribbentrop. "I hear you are in Lord Erskine's shooting party next weekend."

Ribbentrop nods his head. "I'm thinking of holding Oberleutnant Brandenmeyer over to load for me," he says.

"In that case," says the King, "we will look forward to seeing you again there."

Thus, a few days later, he is loading for Ribbentrop at Henscombe Park. It's quite a successful day and von Ribbentrop turns out to be quite a half decent shot. As they are milling around after the shoot, Lord Erskine catches his eye.

"I'm just going along the line to check with the beaters for tomorrow," he says. "Come along for a walk." Guenther does. They light up cigars and puff as they walk.

"Where do you think Germany is going?" he asks.

"Hard to tell," says Guenther. "The overall blueprint is, I'm afraid, only in existence in Hitler's head."

"It's a solo effort?" Erskine seriously asks.

"Indeed," says Guenther. "Whatever his end game is, he isn't sharing it with anybody. However, I'm given to understand that you have something to do with your secret service and if so, how's your budget?"

"What do you have in mind?" Erskine asks.

"I can't help thinking," says Guenther, "that there may be a real need for an honest broker down the track a bit, especially if things go pear-shaped for the Fuhrer."

"Such as...?"

"Hmmm....if he ends up biting off more than he can chew."

Again Erskine asks, "What do you have in mind?"

"Briefly," Guenther says, "there is a Math teacher, a woman heading towards retirement at Cambridge. She has a remarkably retentive mind. If your budget's good, invest a bit for the future. Put her on the secret list, read her the official

secrets act and make it possible for her to buy a pleasant retirement house in Basle. In short, place a sleeper there while you have a ready opportunity to do so. The drawbridge will go down on Fortress Germany soon enough, but I expect that there will still be ready access to Switzerland for some Germans at least. I have no intention of selling Germany down the river, but if it all ends up badly down the track, a settled in and secure communication channel may be invaluable.”

Erskine draws on his cigar. “Can we talk about this further at another time?”

Guenther looks hard at Erskine. “This, my Lord, is a here and now deal. Yes or no. I will set up the channel direct with Flora Jenkins when I hear she is settled in Basle.”

“Okay,” says Erskine. “We will place an ad in the Times Personal column when she is in place, reading ‘the garden is ready’, and you can do the rest.”

“Okay,” says Guenther, “just tell her that and we’re in business, but also importantly, see she gets a post office box for her personal mail. Just double the figures upward and include that in your paper ad. In short,” Guenther continues, “the channel we are discussing, if not used or not much used, should not be written off. The big thing is to ensure its continued existence against the day when it arrives.”

As they approach Ribbentrop, Guenther says to Erskine, “It wouldn’t be a bad thing if you can provide me with some innocuous, but strictly happening stuff that you have on the go that I can leak to my idiot bosses, so that they take me seriously and perhaps send me back to Britain on occasion.”

Lord Erskine doesn’t break stride. “Hmm,” he says, “we are negotiating with Eire to re-occupy our old Irish bases (fat chance, he adds) and the admiralty will be looking at constructing submarine pens at Gibraltar. This won’t happen either, but the survey will. Also, there’s a proposal around to equip the Territorials with a new anti-tank gun called the Piat. That should be enough to go on with.”

“Indeed,” says Guenther.

Sunday rolls along and Guenther, looking hugely impressive in twill trousers, brogues and a stylish sports coat and with a strong feeling of déjà vu, accompanies Sybil to the Choir loft of their old Anglican Church up from Cambridge a bit. Sybil, as in the past, plays the organ and Guenther’s rich baritone voice makes his presence felt. At the end of the service, as the other Choristers leave the loft, Guenther picks over a heap of old hymnals, finds the one he wants. He’s been thinking about this during the service. He rummages for a pencil, hums – dum dum de da da da da da da da and pencils in words on the score.

“Sybil,” he says, “what about playing this so I can sing to it?” He’s used the famous old Anglican hymn, ‘Thine Is the Glory’, as a base to pen in a paeon to the Reich Chancellor. “Don’t take this too seriously,” he says, “I’m just brown-nosing my true employer.” She plays; he brings his powerful voice onto the word. “We have a Saviour, Greatorex (Frederick the Great) re-born-n-n. We stand to serve him, our weapons all suborned. He will-ll lead us to a greater dawn. Hail to the Fuhrer, Leader of the Reich reborn.” He stops. “Gosh, you’re a great organist,” he says, “if I only had a tape recorder.”

Sybil jumps up, rummages in a near cupboard. “Here’s one,” she says, “let me give it a good lead and then hit the note hard.” They finish strongly and she runs off a new tape for him to take away.

Chapter 4

Back in Berlin he goes around to Himmler's headquarters and meets with two of the main players in this, the evil empire. Himmler and Goebbels offer him a coffee and commend him on his efforts in England.

"Despite your size and personification of our resolute Waffen-SS image, it seems you are very good with people," Goebbels says. "Ribbentrop has been very fulsome in his praise."

"Well, it wasn't hard." Guenther says. "I was at Cambridge for quite a while and through my friendship with Lord Erskine's daughter, I met a lot of people who seem to remember me. I dropped the bait you gave me, Sir" he says, "and gleaned the following information, which isn't probably worth much, except it does seem that despite the government's policy of ignoring any talk of war, a bit of planning is going on behind the scenes."

He drops what Lord Erskine gave him. They take a very keen interest in what he has to tell them. "Finally, Sirs," he says, "I composed a little something while in Church at Cambridge, or near Cambridge. Do you have a tape recorder?" They have and they play his tape. "It's only a guide, Sirs, he continues, "but if it's worked up professionally, it may suit as a Choir item when the Chancellor attends the rededication service at Koln Cathedral next month."

Goebbels is ecstatic. "This is absolutely terrific stuff," he says. "Would you like attribution for it?"

"Not at all," says Guenther, "it's all yours. I had a lovely little holiday in Limeyland and this can be seen just as a thank you."

Goebbels says, "We may use your voice; I'll get back to you a tad later this week."

Ten days later, he is in Koln Cathedral with the Choir working the piece up and later again he gets to see the Chancellor close up when the service rolls around. The Waffen-SS is a fast growing military arm and as a parade leader, a fair bit of time is spent on drill. The group are at present located at Potsdam and they mostly parade on the church square there. He has got them goosestepping in perfect unison when one of the new Kubelwagens pulls up and Goebbels himself gets out. Guenther pulls the squad to a sharp stop and they present arms to little Goebbels.

'Gawd,' thinks Guenther, 'this little weed would do well not to come out in open daylight.'

Goebbels is quite chuffed and takes the salute well; which isn't bad as he's an advertising man and creative director of perhaps, the biggest show running in the world today. "Stand them at ease, Guenther," he says, "and lend me your ear."

The upshot of the visit is that the Italian nobleman and famous air force flyer, Count Ciano is coming to Berghof to meet with Ribbentrop, who will shortly be taking over the Foreign Office reins at the Wilhelmstrasse. Hitler will sit in on this meeting to give it top credence to set the ground rules for the future. It's an important meeting as Count Ciano is also taking over the Italian Foreign Ministry. While Guenther doesn't think the Italian Armed Forces are worth a spit, there is no doubt they are well equipped and are gaining valuable experience in the Spanish Civil War, where Mussolini and Hitler are honing the skills of their aviators. That aside,



Mussolini has been in power much longer than Hitler and the political support of Italy is – in a world context – very well worth having.

Anyway, Guenther is told to take 70 Waffen-SS men down to the Berghof for ceremonial duties involved in the big meeting. The squad will be based in Salzburg and will make the trip out for duty. SS Colonel Mueller is the

ringmaster for this show and it's up to Guenther to gee up the soldiers and lead a spit and polish parade. It all goes well and they have to do a bit more than parade duty, as German world is there also. They are taking advantage of the marvellous late summer weather to catch a glimpse of their famous and revered leader. At the conclusion of the parade, Dieter comes down to talk. There's no show without punch and Dieter, a wily and not very robust character, does a lot of Himmler's odd jobs.

He tips Guenther the ghost of a wink and says, "Ribbentrop, oops, von Ribbentrop wants you to change into civvies and stick around, if it's not a problem."

Guenther clicks his heels. "Jahwol, my whimsical friend. Where would you advise me to stick?"

"The library," Dieter says. "Just find something to read. I suppose there is something else in the shelves besides 'Mein Kampf', or at least I hope so." Just look as though you are reading and I suppose Ribbentrop will follow along from that."

Guenther does as he's told, but there are so many copies of Hitler's story there, he selects one for show and takes down a slim volume titled, 'All Power Corrupts', and is having a read of this when Ribbentrop comes in with Ciano. The latter is a good-looking man; immaculate in a very fine pin-striped suit. *'No-one,' Guenther thinks, 'makes better suits than the Italians or rather the Italians in Milan.'*

Ribbentrop opens the conversation. "Something has come up," he says, "that requires I be briefed by the Fuhrer as a forerunner to my new duties as Foreign Minister."

Little does von Ribbentrop know that he is today taking the first steps in quite a career, but a career that will, in less than 9 years time, see him, along with others, hanged in the gymnasium behind the Nuremburg Courthouse. But that's in the future; more pressing events are calling.

"Anyway," he continues, "we are returning to Berlin right away. Goebbels has suggested by phone that we should leave our honoured guest in your care until he is ready to return."

Ciano shakes hands, grins and sits down opposite Guenther. Ribbentrop moves off smartly. Ciano accepts a drink from the white coated steward. He glances at 'Mein Kampf' on the table. "I see you are observing due form by reading the required reading," he says. "I'm told that the original printing ran to 10,000 copies, which escalated to six million after Herr Hitler was anointed Chancellor by President Hindenburg."

Guenther laughs. "It's pretty turgid," he says, thus striking here and now the exact right note that sees him become, in time, a very good friend of this, oh so sophisticated Italian. "But just on its own, it's made its author a millionaire."

"And what's this you're actually reading?"

Guenther laughs again. "I'm amazed to find it here," he says. "I read the English translation at Cambridge. It's a mix of the necessities of life. In short, it sets out Maslow's Law of Human Needs and then goes on to develop the theme that, given Maslow's requirements, the result, inevitably, is that all power corrupts."

Ciano laughs. "While conceding," he says, "that this substantial place is a somewhat awesome retreat for one of the most interesting men in recent history, I'm not looking forward to an evening here. What about we go into Salzburg and see real people at play?"

"No problem," says Guenther, "but let's first go up top and have a look at the finest view in mountain Europe before the light buggers off."

They enter the small four person lift that takes them up through the shaft in the living rock to the top of the mountain. German army engineering have just completed this and have the lift running very smoothly, but the viewing terrace at the

top; the finishing touches are not yet complete. The view of the Obersalzburg is breathtaking.

"This must be a change from machine-gunning North Africans," Guenther says, referring to Ciano's exploits with the Italian Air Force in Ethiopia.

"Hmmm," says the aviator, "I'm not particularly proud of that, but orders are orders."

"You're going to a lot of trouble and expense to acquire huge tracts of shit country."

Ciano looks introspectively at him. "It's where the original Roman Empire was," he says. "Perhaps in time, the Nile."

Dieter has gone back to Berlin with Hitler's retinue, so the new friends take themselves off to Salzburg, pick up a couple of quite good-looking girls and make a night of it. Ciano is off next day. As they part, Ciano says, "The new ski lifts are running at Zermatt. Why don't we meet up in snow season and try them?"

"I look forward to it," Guenther says.

Chapter 5

Guenther gets called around to the Prince Albrecht-Strasse and is ushered in by the man of all work, Dieter. Awaiting his visit is Himmler and Richard Heydrich. *'The Thinker and the Hatchet Man,' Guenther thinks.* The atmosphere is quite cordial. They spring coffee in beautiful Meissen cups and some strudel. This over, they ask, "What do you make of Count Ciano?"

"Hmmm," says Guenther, "The fact that he married Edda Mussolini prejudiced me against him. I had mentally written him off as surely a chancer; but I'm wrong. He is a well-educated man, a man also of action as his flying career endorses. He is a very balanced thinker. While he owes much to his father-in-law, I tend to the view that if things were on a knife edge, he may well vote for what is best for Italy, rather than what is best for Il Duce."

"Hmmm," says Heydrich, "The Chancellor has made enquiries about you and I dug out from Heidelberg University your thesis that reviewed the short wars of history. He's had a look at it. It's not every day one of the world's top identities and statesmen shows interest in the writing of a Drill Oberleutnant. Tell us how you got to University."

"Umm...my tutor," says Guenther. "I expected to go into the Forestry Division of the von Thiessen Estate; my father being their long standing Land Graf, following on his own father in the job. But Erich Schiller enthused him to fund up my later education and he also did a teaching swap for a year with a university tutor with tuberculosis in order to share my tutoring at Heidelberg."

"By and large," Heydrich says, "your first year short war thesis is quite remarkable. What lead you to follow this?"

"Mainly," says Guenther, "because of what happened to Germany in the last big one. It stemmed from study of logistics and supply in the economics part of my course. The Reich can beat the world at everything either culturally or in warfare in a short-run thing. The lack of raw material is the killer. The Americans have iron ore next door to their factories. We have to ship ours in from Sweden in the main. We thus start at a great disadvantage."

Himmler has been sitting, fingers steepled, listening to the back and forth.

"You seem an intelligent man," he now says, "but not a political one."

Guenther says, "I'm a soldier of the Reich, Sir. I do what I'm told and keep my nose clean."

"Hmm," says Himmler, "but you have a sure grasp on things and talking to the tall poppies in England doesn't seem to faze you in any way."

"With due deference, Sirs," Guenther says, "I do no more than use common or horse sense."

Richard Heydrich laughs. "It's not so fucking common," he says, "especially in Germany."

They spring a glass of schnapps and long black cigars.

"The unusual thing for a common soldier, or perhaps better, an upmarket and huge soldier, is that you make indelible impressions wherever you are sent."

"It's only my size, Sir," Guenther says.

"Indeed," says Heydrich. "In any case, the big boss here - gesturing to Himmler - is prepared to take you at face value and we have some jobs for you to do. The big jobs we will tell you ourselves, the smaller jobs calling for discretion, will come to you from Dieter. Long experience with the little weed on this and that has lead us to take him for an honest broker; that is, so far anyway."

There are a lot of political murders occurring in Germany at this time - over 400 last year. Guenther hopes that his work doesn't see him included in hit squads. Anything is possible in this gangster regime, but, as it turns out, what they want him to do is quite meek and mild. They want him up front and centre as lead man on ceremonial occasions. They expect there will be many prominent people visiting Germany in this new Nazi epoch and boy, are they right.

Heydrich says, "You won't have to sweat the small stuff as SS Colonel Mueller will ringmaster the show in the spit and polish and blind obedience to Der Fuhrer. He will give you the script to follow. But, we also want you wearing non-uniform to be our runner into the Swiss banks on occasion and we want you to put together an art preservation and packing unit and we want you to hunt down a really good man on diamonds. These latter won't be needed for just a while, but we want them under our hand and ready and competent for us to utilise."

"Himmler rejoins the conversation. "You carried President Hindenburg's medals so notably at his funeral, that it has kick-started what I promise to be, an interesting career. You will have to be right on the ball with the Berlin Olympics coming up. Now...do you have any misgivings or questions about what we have spelt out?"

Guenther is positive. "The art man that will be needed may be behind barbed-wire as we speak. May I recruit there?"

"Yes," says Heydrich, "but keep the numbers down and keep the matter under wraps."

They are of course, talking about Jewish artisans and that these bosses of the toughest secret police in the world agree to this provides an interesting insight into these architects of terror agenda.

The Olympics come and go and Guenther is on the run with his Honour Guard here and there. After the Captains and Kings depart from Berlin, he barely has time to draw breath when Dieter comes around from Gestapo Headquarters. Von Ribbentrop wants to see him later this day.

"Ah, Guenther," he says at the Wilhelmstrasse, "this Royal bubble that may well burst will, I think, mean that the dumb bums who are running Britain at the moment may have to take sides. Himmler doesn't mind us here (at the Foreign Ministry) sharing your services and the Fuhrer would like your take on the ramifications of the country having to decide between King Edward the 8th on the

throne, or off it with this American chancer (Wallis Simpson) he is sparking quite intently. It's all a bit beyond belief really. Anyway, in a nutshell, you are very well connected in England and you talk their language, so firstly, Himmler wants you to make use of my tailor in Saville Row for some suits for your Switzerland duties and secondly, Adolf wants you to suss out the likely attitudes of the Brits and the likely effects, particularly on old Churchill. It's likely to damage him further, if that's possible, and that suits the Reich. Anyway, come over in the next few days and book in at Claridge's and renew your old friendships. We will, of course, pick up all your expenses and we won't be stingy about it. I'll visit you at the pub; give the Embassy a miss. Make like you're on furlough."

Guenther has a deal of respect for Ribbentrop. He's a man that has put a personal fortune together in difficult times and he's played more than his part in structuring Hitler into absolute power.

Chapter 6

Guenther is well received in London and has a nice visit, during which he takes in the amazing spectacle of the House of Commons; jeering down Winston Churchill in his speech over the Royal matter. The old curmudgeon has had many ups and downs in his Parliamentary career, but this would have to be his downest down. It's humiliation on a grand scale for this stormy petrel of British Politics. As the world knows, King Edward gives the game away and down the track a bit, after he marries and goes to live in Paris, pays an informal visit in response to an invitation from Hitler to the Berghof.

Goebbels at his flamboyant best has been publicising this visit and a horde of the local population turn up to see the famous visitors' greeting by Hitler on the Berghof steps. At departure time, the local police have the good-natured crowd under control and Guenther has his Honour Guard of 70 Waffen-SS standing rigidly at attention, Schmeisser machine pistols across their chests. It's like a scene from a tableau, a Nazi one. Hitler farewells his guests and stands waiting on the steps for them to depart. It's a mild day. The former King is wearing an obviously American suit, while Wallis Simpson is dressed fit to kill. *'Nothing wrong with her taste and bugger the expense,' Guenther thinks.*

To everyone's amazement, the Duke stops in front of Guenther. "Why Gunner," he says, "you're still a first Lieutenant. I had imagined you a General by now."

In split second timing and unerring sense, Guenther barks to his squad, 'Stand Easy'. He says to the next soldier standing behind him, "Get Mueller on the double."

He takes off his helmet, accepts the Duke's proffered hand and says, "Never, your Royal Highness, I'm only a chocolate soldier." He speaks in French and the Duchess appreciates this and laughs a tinkly laugh. "May I compliment you on your frock your Serene Highness – surely Chanel."

The Duchess warmly responds. "Well, she says, I never expected a huge and forbidding soldier to know the nuances of French fashion."

"Well, Duchess, I'm still a young bachelor and as any young bachelor knows or should know, if you're trying to get a good-looking girl out of her frock, its best to be able to compliment her on that frock and recognise the source, for starters."

“Oh my god,” she says, “what a dinner party member you would make. May I prevail on my Royal husband to invite you to such at the Bois de Boulogne, when we get back from visiting Baltimore?”

Guenther grins. “Your wish, your Highness; I will take it as a royal command and wild horses wouldn’t keep me away.”

Colonel Mueller arrives. He doesn’t take part in these staged events, but he always is there wearing his monocle and keeping a gimlet eye on his troops.

“May I present...,” Guenther says to the Royal, “my boss, Colonel Mueller.”

The latter has excellent French as Guenther well knows. Mueller clicks his heels and bows and the Prince very amiably extends his hand; a picture that Goebbels later uses to the full. Guenther goes on, “My family have worked for the Colonel’s family for years on their huge East Prussian estates.” They chat amiably and Guenther throws a sideways look at what Hitler is doing. Old Adolf, having finished with one guest, is usually quick to get back into the Berghof to get on with his next act of political terrorism, but just at the moment, he is standing complacently in the mild sunshine so Guenther knows this little initiative will bring no great wrath on his head, especially as dour old Mueller is chatting to the Royal as if they are old friends.

Some time, much later, Himmler whistles Guenther up and he is told to wait in an ante room at Gestapo Headquarters. There are two men already there and they are all served coffee, or what passes for coffee in Nazi Germany. Its ersatz, made from crushed acorns. Guenther is often in Switzerland in the course of his duties and he always takes over an empty German coffee tin and refills it with the good stuff over there, so at least the coffee in his bachelor quarters is half decent. One of the chaps wearing Wehrmacht uniforms opens up a conversation in Russian. This is no trouble to Guenther as the big estates in East Prussia have always recruited farm labourers from the Ukraine. They’ve even had a few Czechs there from time to time. They chat away for a while and Guenther gets called in to the inner office. Heydrich is there.

“Just testing your Russian, Guenther,” he says. “You’ve passed with flying colours. We would be interested to know how you became fluent in the language of the bloody communists.”

Guenther laughs. “It came about this way,” he says, “apart from the farm workers, I sparked the daughter of one of them over two summers on the estate. There’s nothing like pillow talk to brush up on a foreign language. But why Russian?”

“Umm,” Heydrich says, “this is very sub rosa at this stage. We will tell you, of course, of it in advance, but not yet. Now, do you have any Spanish?”

Guenther laughs and says, “I’ve been to the Running of the Bulls at Pamplona and I have a dirty big horn scar in my bum to prove it.”

Himmler, very unusually chuckles; he’s a very serious man at heart. “Ah, we won’t survey the proof, Guenther,” he says, “but we have you down for a visit to Francoland soon; probably in well-armed mufti.”

The trip takes place, but Hitler, who is accustomed to successfully bullying most of Europe and England, comes a thud. Wily old Franco, displaying a lot more nouse than Benito Mussolini, declines to ally himself with the Axis, although later, he does help them a bit in a semi-neutral way until things start to go pear-shaped. In July of 1939, Guenther gets a short note from Count Ciano. It reads – ‘Gunna, ring me on the ski trip number I gave you.’ This is a smart precaution they set up long back. Everything gets listened to in their totalitarian countries. Guenther does and Ciano says,

“Mate, if we don’t go skiing now, it may never happen. Things are hotting up.

Chapter 7

Ciano is a bit more prescient it turns out, as Hitler's speeches have been, at least for the moment, more conciliatory of late; but Guenther also knows from his English connections, that pacifist old Neville Chamberlain has expressed deep concern for the pressure Hitler has been putting, less than subtly, on Poland.

Anyway, it sufficiently alerts Guenther if no one else, that the Poms look like running out of patience with Hitler. He raises this with Ribbentrop over a bottle of Hock around at the Foreign Office. "Why don't we get an attack of the smarts?" Guenther says. "We own Czechoslovakia now and surely the Army Engineers could push an autobahn or three through the Carpathian Mountains so that we could jump the Wermacht off into the Ukraine. The bread basket is all what we would want from that goddamn wasteland."

Von Ribbentrop sips his Hock. "You know, Guenther, that's the best idea I've heard in some time. I can't argue with logic, but Adolf wants his war. To do what you propose, would delay the jump off for perhaps several years; wouldn't suit our leader I'm afraid, the beggar's impatient."

"Hmm," says Guenther, "no-one in the western world cares a spit for Stalin and his Communists. In what I suggest we could win a war and let's face it, us against the Ruskies would be no match. To unnecessarily bring in France and Britain makes a go for the throat enterprise unnecessarily too wide-spread. We've only been re-arming for a short time really and despite all of the hullabaloo about the Panzers, our army remains the same as in 1915 – horses are still our biggest means of supply and bear well in mind, our army – indeed any army, marches on its stomach."

But Guenther's idea is taken seriously. Ribbentrop's secretary rings him several weeks later, although by that time Guenther has gone to try out the slopes with Ciano. It's a little introspective trip that marks the end of peacetime activities before the cataclysmic events of September 1.

Guenther catches the express train to Brig while Ciano comes up on the cross-over service from Milan. They catch the rack (cog) railway to Zermatt and they stay in some comfort in the hotel in the main street where the first party to climb the Matterhorn put up. The ski slopes from the Matterhorn glacier ridge are a dream and they get in some very decent runs on slopes that in summer, convert to wonderful walk trails. Over some excellent German beer, they discuss the problems of their world.

"The real problem," Ciano says, "is that Mussolini is convinced that the Brits won't fight over Poland and if that happens, the French will also lay doggo."

He tells Ciano of his Carpathian Mountains idea. Ciano applauds it, but thinks Hitler is ready to go and won't look at sensible alternatives. On their last day there at breakfast, Guenther says, "What's on today, Galeazzo?"

"Umm," says the man, "let's finish this excellent omelette and take coffee and a couple of brandies out to the Terrace. I want to show you something; something that just possibly may be of a life-saving nature well down the track. Put your best walking boots on and a heavy jacket and bring a stick."



They head up the side of the deep valley Zermatt stands in; there's a bit of sunshine today and the upper parts of the Matterhorn shine in this like a beacon. There's a deal of snow on the trail and the going is not easy. Finally, they strike a long, sheltered cleft running upslope on an angle and come out at a villa that looks down to Zermatt. It's like a view from a plane. Ciano produces a huge iron key and opens the front door. The lodge is roomy, has magnificent picture window views and Ciano throws a match into the set fire in the Swiss fireplace. He hunts around a bit and produces a good packet of jerky and a dusty bottle of dry white

wine. They sit back as the fire takes hold and have a little repast and light up their pipes.

"You know, Guenther," he says, "there's that old saying; 'three men can conceivably keep a secret'."

"Ah yes," Guenther replies, "but only if two are dead."

"Indeed," he says. "It's likely that the secret I'm going to show you today will only be practical if one of us is dead. I would like to think that we two will survive to wait out the cataclysm that I fear is about to engulf us and that we will safely await results here, smoking our pipes and living comfortably until it is safe for us to emerge from the hidey hole that I'm about to show you and emerge to the dawn of a new and better day. Come..." he says and they go back out of the lodge and essay a climb up another 100 metres above them and enter a deep and very narrow cutting in the rock.

You would never know the entry point was there. It looks to be a vertical sheet of rock, but it's sprung-loaded and finely balanced. Ciano produces a torch when they get inside. He shows Guenther a big sliding bolt, well oiled.

"This, when shot," he says, "stops the entry swinging in. It's an old aquifer tunnel; you can see the water running in the bottom, about 20 metres down. Now..." he continues, "you can't have a hidey hole that lets smoke out, but you have to have heat to stay alive."

He lowers, on tracks, a small dynamo-like mechanical device down on a well-greased slide.

Ciano says, "All you do is lower this device into the stream of the aquifer and the revs generate electrical power for everything here, in what used to be the tool room when this was originally built."

He turns on electric light, pushes a cooking oven start button and turns on several electric fires.

"Heat and comfort," he says, "and if anything goes wrong with the device, there are six more here, made by AG Siemens best efforts, that are replacements."

Along one wall of the room are four bunk beds projecting out of the living rock. There's also quite a good shower recess with electric hot water.

"But surely the village knows about this," Guenther says.

"Not," says Ciano, "One, at times, must be ruthless to preserve a contingency plan and the Sargeant of Engineers and the Algerian workers who did all this, all went west in Ethiopia. They are not around to blow any whistles."

"Mate," Guenther says, "there is no corner store to visit for top-up supplies?"

"Not needed," Ciano says. "Let me show you where the hard tack is stored."

He takes Guenther up a series of shallow steps and they arrive at a steel plate door. This opens inwards to a tall underground pantry filled with provisions. Cans, big bottles of olives, picked onions, dry waxed sacks, shelves of bottles of wine, cans of olive oil, egg powder, flour.

Ciano says, "This was all sourced from the Quartermaster at the Verona Alpen Corp Base. It's all tickety boo subsistence fodder for soldiers. The wine was my personal idea. This was the ventilator shaft for the aquifer, which we narrowed down to allow this space for storage. Everything came in by slings from the top and when it was complete, the engineer removed the top 10 metres of the cliff ladder. It's designed to stop this becoming a climb path for summer visitors. In general," he continues, "the surest and safest way to access this hidey hole, is to make use of the iron brackets that used to carry the top section of the ladder, to attach ropes and rappel down onto the remaining ladder from the flat little Alpine meadow directly above."

"But..." asks Guenther, "how do you access the meadow?"

"Depending on the time of year, you can make it on foot," Ciano replies, "or put a Fieseler Storch tiny plane down on the ground, or even parachute down at...say ...dusk. There is almost no chance of being rumbled if you come in that way instead of up from the village."

"And the meadow can be identified from the air?" Guenther asks.

"It's the only bit of flat ground around," Ciano replies. "I've had autobahn reflectors fitted on tiny stone cairns so that the landing lights of a small plane could pick them up easily, but not, of course, when there's snow on the ground. I'll show you the aerial photos next, to make IDing the spot easy."

They part amicably at Brig; Guenther to Geneva and Ciano to Milan on the cross express trains.

"If the time comes to go underground," Ciano says, "travel very light. Everything you need is in the hidey hole, except for new batteries for the short wave radio."

Quite a few people are looking for Guenther back in Berlin, but he doesn't get pressed too hard, as he is in and out of Switzerland at various times.

"Met a girl," he says. "She wouldn't let me hurry home."



Late in August, he is on the plane with Ribbentrop and party to meet Stalin and Molotov in Russia. He interprets where needed and when the signing of the secret protocols defining the division of Poland comes up, he is rather astonished at the content. The Russians bargain hard, but underneath, in view of the vitriol that Hitler has poured on the Communists in his climb to power, Guenther thinks that what he has been a party to, is really a huge play for time to allow both nations to organise their agendas.

He is also amazed that Hitler has left it so late to get this non-aggression pact together, as just a bit later, the Panzers, after a staged bit of provocative showmanship, roll into Poland. The phoney war is the next stage and then the world erupts.

Chapter 8

Guenther has his squad in hand in Compiègne just a few yards back from the forest clearing and the old wagon-lit carriage in which the Germans signed off on the last war. Nothing is happening pending the arrival of Hitler. The French are inside the carriage sitting in funereal gloom. Guenther pulls up a crate and gives his men the historical background on what they are here to provide – the Honour Guard – and witness the capitulation of the French. A few of the International Press are also here and William Shirer walks over to listen to what Guenther is saying. He talks to Guenther after.

“You were decently objective to all this,” he says. “You didn’t crow.”

Guenther laughs. “Mr Shirer,” he says, “this is just a first step on a long and tortuous journey. If I get to speak to my men in Trafalgar Square, I reserve the right to crow then.”

“Hmm,” says Shirer, “should I reserve a table for tea at the Ritz?”

“We’ll see,” Guenther says.

They get the word and stand in Honour Guard pattern as Hitler, full of himself and understandably so, arrives in his huge Mercedes Touring car.

With the Wehrmacht running Europe, Guenther finds he has a lot on his plate. They start the systematic looting of the famous galleries and shipping this into Germany. Guenther has his long structured working team housed in Dachau concentration camp, a few kilometres out from Munich. They are soon evaluating big collections of art and sculpture, jewellery and plate. Goering is the doyen of the Nazi collectors and Air Force aides bring out to Guenther, long shopping lists of what he wants. Most of the hierarchy are into collecting and a good deal of this goes into their private banks in Switzerland. There’s just so much of it. A big workshop in Munich is flat tack building very strong, but not too bulky picture crates. Storage rooms are set up deep into Austria.

Hitler’s secretary, Martin Bormann, questions Guenther closely as to why he is operating out of Munich. It’s a silly question really, as the RAF are over Berlin many nights dropping bombs. Guenther can hardly tell Bormann this, so he shrugs it off as being near his Dachau labour supply. One of the sharp brains behind things at Gestapo Headquarters goes out when partisans assassinate Richard Heydrich at Prague. *‘One less evil genius,’ Guenther thinks.*

When things start to go pear-shaped in Russia, the underemployed Foreign Minister, von Ribbentrop, whistles Guenther up. He wants to know how readily the huge deposits in the Swiss banks can be accessed in Argentina. It’s an interesting insight into the line of thought being followed by this chap; one of the real thinkers of the Third Reich. Guenther assures him that the Swiss related banks in South America will create no problems for the holders of the money, so far as access is concerned.

“Hmmm,” von Ribbentrop says. “It might be timely to set up land holdings of a discreet nature there if we want to transfer some of our brains overseas for safety sake. Perhaps you could go over and exercise your considerable powers of discretion in deals.”

This startles Guenther. Clearly Ribbentrop thinks the present war, despite its huge scale and the amount of military assets involved, is going down and not in Germany’s favour.

“We can arrange it with the Navy,” Ribbentrop says, “send you over in a distance submarine, making use of tanker ships we have lying idle in the South Atlantic, to fuel the underwater craft both coming and going.”

This sends shivers up Guenther’s spine. He is inclined to claustrophobia and the thought of an extended period underwater in a huge tin can has little appeal.

"I doubt," he says, "that my other masters would let me go while I'm in the midst of a huge art split up programme."

"Who then?" Ribbentrop asks.

"Dieter," Guenther replies.

Von Ribbentrop stands up. "Talk to him," he says. Guenther does.

"Dieter, old friend," he says, "a few cracks are appearing in the edifice. There is an idea around to send you over to the Argentine to set up a few holiday escape places. Things may be worse than I thought."

Dieter laughs. "You don't know the half of it, Gunner; the Air Force loaded up one of their new jet power Messerschmidts about 10 days ago and found a day clear enough for photos and snapped all around Stalingrad, pursued by Ivan's fighters. They never got near our spy plane and it got back with photos of the Ivans on the ground build up. Kesselring has seen the photos and all hell is breaking loose at Rastenberg."

They sit in silence. Dieter breaks it. "Yes, I'll go. Just tell me what to do and make plenty of dosh available."

"It'll be a verbal brief only, Dieter," Guenther says. "Perhaps it would be very wise not to hurry back."

Dieter laughs a sharp barking laugh. "Message received and understood, Gunner," he says.

Chapter 9

Early in 1944 events coalesce into the most significant day in Guenther's life to date. At this time, he is running his fine arts sort-out programme out of a big block house-type biscuit factory in Munich. It's been commandeered from its Jewish owners and as there is no market for fine biscuits in the Reich at the moment where it's all Army biscuits, he has made use of the huge space available and here is where Guenther's helpers categorise and catalogue the huge amount of art coming in.

He has three separate operations running. The main one is the fine arts of great interest and value, the second is the good, but lesser stuff, which is destined to be crated and stored in underground salt mines in Austria and the largest lot is the middle of the road stuff that in itself in normal times is also very saleable. This is just accumulating, both here and in outer Munich storage spaces. He's got so much of this, he is considering a crush and burn programme, but he can't be too cavalier about this, as the week before his art divvy, a little Jewish art dealer, in normal times in Germany long past, has discovered a tickety-boo Bernini painting.

This one has been spoken for by Hitler before it was found. Bormann has been down to Guenther's place with an order for something interesting for Mussolini's birthday. *'This is where the just found Bernini is bound to end up,' Guenther thinks.* Next in his door, accompanied by a Schmeisser-toting guard is Adolf Eichmann; most likely the most industrious psychopath in the world. He spends his time hunting down Jews. He doesn't muck around.

"I'm thinking of sending Sauckel to one of my less salubrious camps," he says. "He's lived longer than he should."

Guenther stands; reaches over for a folder. "Ah, Herr Eichmann," he says, "that could cost you a lot of marks later on."

"How so?" asks the evil one.

“Well..,” Guenther says, “our mutual boss, Reichsfuehrer Himmler has no objection to our country’s military hierarchy sharing in the spoils of war.” He pulls several canvases out of the folder. “Here is your share for today.”

Eichmann looks quizzically at the offerings. “Who by?” he asks.

“The sketches are Rembrandt, Van Eyck and one by the English painter, Joseph Mallord Turner. The framed one is Millais.”

“How authentic?” asks Eichmann.

“The Millais is provenanced,” is the reply, “and is worth a lot of Marks. The Rembrandt and Turner sketches have my Divvy’s authentication only at this stage, but he is never wrong. If you plan to send him up one of your Camp’s chimneys, he won’t be around to fight for the world provenancing of those very three valuable bits of art.”

“Umm,” says Eichmann, “I’ll take them away and ponder your opinion. Now..,” he continues, “I wouldn’t mind having a very anonymous country villa, perhaps in Chile.”

“Not in Argentina?” Guenther asks.

“Could get a bit crowded,” Eichmann says.

“Umm,” says Guenther, “you obviously know what we are doing over there, so I’ll have Dieter look into what you ask. Banking may not be so easy in Chile; at least access to Swiss banks.”

“I perhaps can live with that,” the dapper little man says. “Keep up the good work.” He finishes his coffee. “Good stuff,” he says, “hardly Army issue.”

Guenther laughs. “We work hard here,” he says. “It’s just a small compensation.”

Later the same day, Christian Brandt comes to visit. He’s had a good career on Karl Donitz’s staff; certainly on U-boat administration.

“You’re a long way from the sea, Christian,” he says. “Is the U-boat war going that badly?”

Brandt laughs. “It’s surely not going goodly,” he says. “The tide has turned for the U-boats, as any intelligent services officer in Germany knows. I’m going to do a bit of skiing in Switzerland and I’ve called really to sound you out on a change of management of the country.”

Guenther laughs. He knows that a plot to eliminate Hitler is inevitable, but he’s a bit staggered that it comes up on his horizon via one of Donitz’s staff officers.

“Christian,” he says, “do you remember our university days in America when we used to take those Vassar girls ice-hole fishing in Wisconsin?”

“Surely,” comes the reply. “They were fun times.”

“Yes, indeed,” Guenther says, “and the girls always said you were the joker of the pack. Now....not another word about your new amusing idea.”

“It’s serious?” Christian says.

“Well it is for you, Christian,” Guenther says. “I’m bound to report this to my boss, but I’m not due in Berlin until Friday. This will give you time to get to Sweden and turn yourself in for internment. It will save your life and if the Gestapo get hold of you, the lives of other well-meaning fellow countrymen.”

“How best do I get to Sweden?” Christian asks.

“It can be done from Geneva,” Guenther says, and for old times’ sake, I can smooth your way. Here’s what you have to do.”

Guenther has to do this, although he has no intention of telling Himmler. He well knows the Gestapo ways. If, in the fullness of time, they were to get hold of Christian, inevitably the fact he has even spoken to Guenther on this matter will

come out with dreadful repercussions. The plot proceeds of course, and the top men involved pay with their lives for an action of political suicide, but personal heroism.

Chapter 10

By the time the Allies come ashore at Normandy, the very best of the artwork at Munich is tucked away in Swiss banks, some even in Sweden. Guenther doesn't tell anyone about the Swedish lot, it's a nest-egg, perhaps. The middle lot is crated well and well stored in situ in Munich. It will certainly cause a bit of jubilation and gloating among the Allied invaders in due course. It will take them a while to realise that it's only the leftovers.



By the time the Russian artillery can be heard firing into Berlin, Guenther decides it's time. He carries not one thing out; it would be a dead giveaway. At full dark on April 17, Guenther makes his way down the main drag where the Luftwaffe are flying spotter planes off from. Heinrich Priem, his pilot, has his Storch stored in a building undercroft, just off the street a bit.

"All set?" Guenther asks.

"Jahwol, Oberleutnant," the man says.

"Heine," Guenther says, "how far away is your girlfriend?"

"She's living here in the building," he says.

"Put her into comfortable clothes and put her on board. This is strictly a one way trip out of disasterville."

"What should she bring?" Heine asks.

"Nothing...we can't look to be leaving town if we get questioned."

They set off in the dark to Munich and set down near the biscuit factory on the roadway. They roll out avgas stored there and fill up the reliable little Storch and garage it for the day. They are away the minute it is dark; it's still dark when Heine puts on his landing lights to pick up the small meadow at Zermatt. He puts down easily enough and Guenther and Heidi tumble out of the plane. Guenther has a cowed torch with him and he takes that out of the plane, along with a roll of strong light rope.

"Now Heine," he says, "strap on your chute and run back over the meadow; look for my torch; put the Storch on manual throttle on a slight upward plane and bale out. We'll find you, but here's a whistle to call us with when you're down."

A little later they are in the ladder area and Guenther is relieved to find the mounts that used to hold the ladder. He has certainly studied up on his directions. He ties a boot loop in the bottom of the rope and using a friction block that goes with the rope, he lowers Heine with the torch.

"If my calculations are correct, you will bump up against the top of the ladder. Get on it and give the rope a tug and be ready to steady Heidi when she comes down."

With Heidi safely down to the ladder top, Guenther separates the rope ends and goes hand over hand to join them.

"I won't pull the rope out of its mount yet," he says, "I'll come back to do that if things are okay at the bottom."

And despite the passage of the six years since he and Ciano were last here, he accesses the hidey-hole with no great difficulty. He knows, regrettably, that Ciano won't be here settled comfortably in. The true fascists have him under lock and key in Verona jail for his part in pulling Mussolini down and Guenther thinks it's highly unlikely that Ciano will emerge from there on his own feet. The torch holds up well and in less than an hour, they have the Siemens generator up and running and light and power on. He turns to Heidi.

"Can you cook an omelette from powdered eggs?"

The girl is bright. "Where's the pantry?" she asks.

The short-wave radio for which he has brought batteries, tells them that the Ivans have got into the final stages of the street battle for Berlin, but nothing yet is known of Hitler's fate. He is thought to be at the Berghof; certainly the Yanks think he is. Planted stories of a last ditch mountain stand have worked it seems, Eisenhower and his staff are turning armies in that direction in pursuit if this very effective furphy. They tap into a few ham-operators in wireless-mad Germany and thus get a handle on the fate of the men and women in Berlin are going through.

They live very circumspectly in the hidey-hole. Guenther sets up a few precautions as the weather is conducive now for climbers and hikers to come into the hills. So far there have been no intruders, although there's plenty of comings and goings in Zermatt, which they look down onto or can easily look down onto by climbing up the ledge a bit.

Chapter 11

With the war now well over they throw off their hidey-hole shackles and move into the Lodge. It's immensely comfortable and well stocked with books and a good wine cellar. Actually, the wines are not as good as those in the chimney shaft, so Ciano was quite selective in his stocking up. Heidi talks closely in German with Ciano's caretaker when they eventually meet up with him. He exhibits no surprise to find them ensconced in the house.

"Count Galeazzo told me that you would arrive sooner or later," he says. "I have been thinking that you wouldn't arrive at all."

"Are you being paid?" Guenther asks.

"Yes," he says. "It comes in through an Italian bank as in the past."

"Let me know if it stops," Guenther says. "I will fill in the gap if need be."

The caretaker takes down lists from Heidi. She dimples at Guenther.

"Lord most high and of all," she says, "can you spring me some dosh?"

Guenther grins and does, and does it pay off! On Sunday morning, she comes into Guenther's room wearing a night rail of skimpy proportions that she has made herself on the old Drexler machine in the laundry. He pulls aside his blanket.

"Gunner," she says, "Heine and I have reached agreement."

"On what?" Guenther asks.

"Ah...a ménage a trois," she says. "There is simply nothing we wouldn't do for you. You have given us life and hope of a future."

Guenther gets out of bed; he's wearing nothing and yells out the door to Heine. "Heine, do you agree with all this?"

“Jahwol Herr Oberleutnant,” he responds smartly. “It’s the least we can do and we have only held off until we could find a suitable double bed, or say a now triple bed.”

We can forward things a bit and skip the detail of the three months the ménage a trois spend lotus eating at the Lodge, before the two men and a slightly pregnant Heidi climb down the incline to Zermatt to make their presence and identity known to the Authorities. It’s a well-judged three months, as post war Germany starts to settle down. Otto Skorzeny gets in touch. He’s going into the Ready-mix concrete construction business; a business that takes all of them into a fortune as Germany, using USA finance, rebuilds from almost scratch.

Guenther eventually gets over to the grouse shoot at Lord Erskine’s. Sybil is back. She’s married and divorced an American civilian.

“It’s time for a new start, Guenther,” she says. “Are you amenable to a proposal?”

“Why not?” Guenther says. “I have bought a partly damaged house in Potsdam and I’m sure we can make it a home.” But they don’t for quite a while.

“Let’s work out of Bonn,” Otto says. “It’s not a bad idea to camp near to where you get your bread from.”

They get together at Stahlhelm; meetings and over-crowded meetings and steins of beer toast the past.

“Twelve years it took,” Otto says. “Just twelve years from start to finish. It was a hell of a ride.”

“Ja,” says Guenther, “a ride that we were incredibly lucky to have got off intact. By the way, I’ve heard from Dieter; he’s now Mayor of a bigish town in the Argentine.”

“Hmm,” says Otto, “I hope for their own safety, that the town Auditors aren’t too conscientious.”