EIGHT MONTHS AFTER BORMANN'S CANNY DIRECTIVES of the Strasbourg conference were put into operation behind the scenes, and in line with his prophetic foresight, Germany's Western Front collapsed. The bitterly defended Rhine had been crossed at Remagen Bridge in early March; shortly, the main Allied battle force swarmed over a broad front at Wesel supported by artillery fire from 2,000 guns and by airborne landings by the American 17th and the British 6th divisions. I stood in the open bay of a Dakota that was hauling gliders laden with soldiers; I recorded history for broadcast later that day from Paris to New York and on to the network. A friend, Joseph Fountain, heard the broadcast on his car radio as he drove north on Riverside Drive in New York, and he wrote me, "It was so clear I could even hear the shrapnel hitting the side of your airplane."

General Patton's U.S. Third Army entered Frankfurt, racing eastward until ordered by General Eisenhower to stop at the Elbe River. Prime Minister Churchill was urging that the push go on, for he wanted Allied armored divisions in Berlin before the Russians got there, for compelling political reasons. The German capital symbolized all of Germany, and in a message to Eisenhower the British prime minister said, "I deem it highly important we should shake hands with the Russians as far to the east as possible." General Patton was likewise pressuring
Eisenhower to let him run again at the Elbe, where his command caravan was parked with the restless G.I.s of the Third Army. Patton was confident he could make it to Berlin, Vienna, or even Prague before the Red Army. Stalin, however, was demanding as his prize the city of Berlin, and Roosevelt, in failing health and unable to contend with the driving insistence of the Soviet leader, again acquiesced, as he had on too many issues at Yalta, where he gave away more than he should have. With Berlin assured, Stalin was positioned advantageously, emboldened to wage the cold war that was to follow his seizure of eleven victim countries swept into the Soviet bloc.

For days Prime Minister Churchill had tried to reach President Roosevelt to dissuade him from halting American troops at the Elbe. The replies to him were all issued by General Marshall, an indication, Churchill realized, that the president was dying. Much earlier in London, upon his return from the Yalta Conference, Mr. Churchill had expressed privately the opinion that he would never again see the president alive, remarking that Roosevelt at Yalta was “sallow, wan, dispirited; the problems of command and war had taken their toll of his body.” When the news of Roosevelt’s death crackled over the Berlin radio, Josef Goebbels, the wily intellectual of Hitler’s inner circle, had just returned by motor car from the Eastern Front. The city was suffering bombardment, and the Adlon Hotel was burning. As he mounted the stairs of the Propaganda Ministry, a German reporter said to him, “Herr Reichsminister, Roosevelt is dead.” Goebbels stood transfixed, then invited the reporter inside for some champagne. Speaking on his private line to the Fuehrerbunker beneath the Chancellery building, Goebbels informed Hitler: “My Fuehrer, I congratulate you! Roosevelt is dead. It is written in the stars that the second half of April will be the turning point for us. This is Friday, April the 13th. It is the turning point!” Hitler made a reply to Goebbels, and when the propaganda minister had replaced the telephone in its cradle, he was ecstatic.

It is not strictly true that Hitler and Goebbels believed in astrology, but several Nazi leaders such as Himmler did; this was tolerated and served to amuse the Fuehrer. Goebbels would employ astrology or any device he could think of to cheer up his leader. As he remarked after the telephone call, “Crazy times call for crazy measures.”

In the last week before Berlin’s fall to Marshal Zhukov’s Red Army, a Wagnerian denouement was taking place fifty feet below the Chancellery, in the Fuehrerbunker. The notables who had ridden the crest of National Socialism for twelve years had deserted Hitler, save for his two trusted aides, Martin Bormann and Josef Goebbels.

Hermann Goering had fled with his retainers to Obersalzberg, where in the temporary safety of his chalet he could gaze over to Berchtesgaden on a nearby mountaintop. Goering, the Reichsmarshal, had failed the Luftwaffe by indifferent leadership; Goering, originator of the Gestapo and the concentration camp system, on July 31, 1941, in agreement with Himmler, had written to Reinhard Heydrich, “I hereby charge you with making all necessary preparations for bringing about a complete solution of the Jewish question in the German sphere of influence in Europe.” From that directive grew the chilling spectacles of Auschwitz, Dachau, and the other terminal camps. Goering had taken Hitler at his word in 1941 that the war was won, and had thereafter lived as a sybarite, with a life style resembling that of an oriental potentate, complete with flowing robes, painted toenails, and jewel-encrusted martial batons.

Heinrich Himmler departed the Fuehrerbunker, never to show up again, following a depressing staff conference and birthday party for Hitler on April 20. He reached his headquarters at Ziethen castle the next day and there fantasized about succeeding Hitler following the collapse of the Third Reich. Intertwoven in his thoughts was the idea of a meeting with General Eisenhower to plan a new Germany. “Should I bow to him, or should I shake hands?” was a question he posed to SS General Schellenberg, who was to flee to Sweden in the last week of the war. Schellenberg would later turn himself in to SHAEF, where he would become a prisoner of war, write his memoirs (with the help of two journalists), which would lack credibility, and then die in 1952. Himmler, the ogre who dispassionately ordered the death of entire races, Jews and Slavs, could never endure the sight of death.

Grand Admiral Doenitz, commander of the U-boat forces,
retired to Flensburg on the German–Danish border, where he would represent the machinery of Nazi government after Hitler's suicide, and arrange for the unconditional surrender of all German armed forces at Rheims, France, on May 7, 1945. He died on January 6, 1981, in his home at Kiel, honored by 2,500 veterans, some with Knight's Crosses tied with red and black ribbons around their necks, but unhonored by officials of the Federal Republic in Bonn, fearful of any impetus to neo-Nazism.

Albert Speer, the dedicated technocrat who built highways and bridges and stately buildings for Hitler, had served as minister of armaments and war production. He disdained others of the inner circle, and had for years been a foe of Martin Bormann. When Speer departed the Fuehrerbunker for the last time on April 24, after confessing to Hitler the steps he had taken to countermand the Fuehrer's order for a scorched-earth policy in Germany, and was agreeably surprised at not being hauled out by guards and shot in the garden, he flew out of Berlin and went first to Himmler, then proceeded to Schleswig-Holstein, where he joined Doenitz at Flensburg.

Both Goering and Himmler were stripped of power during the last week. The former, heir apparent since 1941, had sent an injudicious telegram to Hitler asking confirmation of his status as successor, and giving a deadline for the reply. Bormann observed to Hitler that the Reichsmarshal was usurping the Fuehrer's power, pointing to the deadline phrase as evidence. Hitler erupted and ordered Bormann to draft a teletype reply. It stated that Goering had committed high treason, for which the penalty was death. This would not apply if Goering resigned from all his offices. Bormann also sent a teletype to the SS in Obersalzberg, ordering the arrest of Goering for high treason. It was announced in Berlin that Goering had resigned all his offices, for reasons of health.

Heinrich Himmler's dream that he would be designated Fuehrer after Hitler's death was shattered when the news came that he had been removed as successor via Hitler's last will and testament. Himmler had been conducting personal peace negotiations with Count Bernadotte of Sweden as intermediary with the Allies, also promising Hitler's body to the West, and news of this was reason aplenty for Hitler to eliminate the SS leader as his intended successor. A conference took place the night of April 28–29 in the Fuehrerbunker, attended only by Hitler, Bormann, and Goebbel. The last will and testament was drafted, and referring to Himmler reads: "Before my death I expel from the Party and from all his offices the former Reichsfuehrer SS and Reich Minister of the Interior, Heinrich Himmler."

Adolf Hitler's private will was a simple document:

Since I did not think I should take the responsibility of entering into marriage during the years of combat, I have decided now before termination of life on this earth, to marry the woman who, after many years of true friendship, entered voluntarily into this already almost besieged city, to share my fate. She goes to death with me as my wife, according to her own desire. Death will replace for us that of which my work in the service of my people robbed us.

What I own belongs—as far as it is of any value at all—to the Party. Should the Party no longer exist, it will belong to the state. Should the state also be destroyed, any further decision from me is no longer necessary.

The paintings in the collections which I have bought during the years have never been acquired for private purposes, but always exclusively for the creation of an art gallery in my native town of Linz a.d. Donau.

It is my heartfelt desire that this legacy shall be fulfilled.

My most faithful party member, Martin Bormann, shall be the executor of this testament. He is authorized to make all decisions to be final and legal. He is permitted to take everything which either has personal souvenir value or which is necessary for the maintenance of a small bourgeois household and give it to my brothers and sisters, and especially to the mother of my wife and my faithful co-workers who all are well known to him. There are most of all my old secretaries, Mrs. Winter, etc., who for many years gave me loyal cooperation.

I and my wife choose death to escape the disgrace of being forced to resign or to surrender. It is our wish to be cremated immediately at the place where I have done the greatest part of my work during the twelve years of service for my people.

The will was signed on April 29, 1945, by Adolf Hitler, witnessed by Martin Bormann, Dr. Goebbel, and Nicolaus von Below, Hitler's air force adjutant.
His political testament was an expression in greater detail of work done for Germany and the German people. He lays blame for the war “on those international statesmen who were either of Jewish origin or who worked in the Jewish interest.” There exists nowhere in the official records even a scrap of paper attesting to the fact that Hitler caused the creation of death camps for Jews and others. But one significant speech, made on January 30, 1939, and directed at President Roosevelt, who was giving every indication of supporting a war against Germany, outlined the course Hitler planned for the future.

“Today I will once more be a prophet. If the international Jewish financiers inside and outside Europe should again succeed in plunging the nations into a world war, the result will not be the bolshevization of the earth and the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race throughout Europe.”

This, in 1939.

In his political testament, signed in Berlin on April 29, 1945, Hitler returns again to this same theme, arguing that death camps for Jews were more humane than death under bombardment.

I left no doubt that it would not be tolerated this time, that millions of European children of the Aryan people should starve to death, that millions of grown-up men should suffer death, and that hundreds of thousands of women and children should be burnt and bombed to death in the cities, without the real culprit suffering his due punishment, even though through more humane methods.

Swayed by a philosophy thus expressed and repeated many times over, Goering, Hitler’s decree successor at that time, ordered Reinhard Heydrich to “make all necessary preparations for bringing about a complete solution of the Jewish question in the German sphere of influence in Europe.”

Hitler then completed the second part of his political testament, which was to expel former Reichsmarshall Hermann Goering from the party, in his place appointing Grand Admiral Doenitz as president of the Reich and as supreme commander of the armed forces. He also expelled Heinrich Himmler and appointed Gauleiter Karl Hanke as Reichsleiter of the SS and chief of the German police, and Gauleiter Paul Geisler as Reichsminister of the interior.

Martin Bormann had finally won out over Goering and Himmler; Dr. Goebbels, who was made Reichschancellor, would also be shortly gone, in a suicide pact with his wife, shot on his orders by an SS guard, and with their six children quietly put to death by injections administered by a physician.

The newly created Party Minister Bormann then sent copies of all these documents by special courier to Doenitz. He composed the covering letter as follows:

Dear Grand Admiral!

Since all our divisions failed to appear our situation seems to be beyond hope. The Fuehrer dictated last night the attached political testament. Heil Hitler!

Yours, (signed) Bormann

With the last will and testament drawn up and signed and a ceremony of marriage between Hitler and Eva Braun performed before Walter Wagner, city councilor and registrar of Berlin, Eva Braun from force of habit signed her name Eva B—, scratched out the “B,” and completed the signature as “Eva Hitler.” Those present in the chancellery bunker knew it was time for the climactic scene, for the death of the Hitlers. There was, however, first a champagne breakfast for senior officials, and following that the usual morning staff conference. It was estimated that the Russians would overrun the bunker by May 1. A nearby bridge was being defended by youngsters of the Hitler Youth, and heavy fighting elsewhere was by SS units largely composed of Ukrainians, Romanians, Bulgarians, Hungarians, and Croats, long ago joined with the Nazis, who had reasoned that it was better to die in battle than in a Russian slave camp. The last airplane to depart from Berlin had landed on April 28, flown by a sergeant pilot of the Luftwaffe who had circled down from 13,000 feet and rolled to a stop on the east–west axis roadway leading past the Tiergarten and the chancellery. It was there to fly to safety Ritter von Greim, much decorated fighter pilot and new field marshal of the Luftwaffe, who had replaced Goering, and Hanna Reitsch, the landed woman test pilot. On Hitler’s orders, Greim was to leave this night and, once secure at Luftwaffe headquarters, was to mount an attack on Russian positions in Berlin. They took off after midnight, and as the Arado 96 aircraft climbed it was tossed
about by exploding shells. leveling out of reach of the fire, they could see the city being consumed far below, and they headed for Ploen and German command headquarters, where both von Greim and Reitsch met with Grand Admiral Doenitz.

On this same night an officer courier also left by ground route with a special message for Field Marshal Keitel at Combined General Staff Headquarters at Ploen: he carried Hitler's valedictory to the German armed forces. The remainder of April 29 was taken up with brief farewells to staff members. In the early morning of the next day, Hitler, on Bormann's arm, left his office to bid goodbye to twenty women of the staff. Then he retired to his quarters and at 3:30 A.M. a single shot was heard. Those who rushed into the suite saw Hitler, dead from a bullet through his mouth, and Eva Hitler, sitting in a chair, dead from a poison capsule. It was their choice—capture and degradation or self-inflicted death. Following instructions of hours before by Hitler, SS guards bore the bodies up to the garden, doused them with gasoline, and set them afame. The tragically fated pair had learned what furious partisans had done to Mussolini and his mistress, Clara Petacci: following the retreat and surrender of German armed forces in northern Italy, the former dictator and his love were hanged upside down in a Milano marketplace and pelted with stones.

Bormann dispatched two teletype messages to Flensburg:

GRAND ADMIRAL DOENITZ—
IN PLACE OF THE FORMER REICHSMARSHAL GOERING THE FUEHRER APPOINTS YOU, Herr GRAND MARSHAL, AS HIS SUCCESSOR. WRITTEN AUTHORITY IS ON ITS WAY. YOU WILL IMMEDIATELY TAKE ALL SUCH MEASURES AS THE SITUATION REQUIRES.

BORMANN

Then,

THE TESTAMENT IS IN FORCE. I WILL JOIN YOU AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.
TILL THEN I RECOMMEND THAT PUBLICATION BE HELD UP.

BORMANN

A third teletype was received by Doenitz:

THE FUEHRER DIED YESTERDAY AT 15.30 HOURS. TESTAMENT OF 29 APRIL APPOINTS YOU AS REICH PRESIDENT, REICH MINISTER DR. GOEBBELS AS

REICH CHANCELLOR, REICHSLEITER BORMANN AS PARTY MINISTER, REICH MINISTER SEYSS-INQUART AS FOREIGN MINISTER. BY ORDER OF THE FUEHRER, THE TESTAMENT HAS BEEN SENT OUT OF BERLIN TO YOU, TO FIELD MARSHAL SCHÖNER, AND FOR PRESERVATION AND PUBLICATION. REICHSLEITER BORMANN INTENDS TO GO TO YOU TODAY AND INFORM YOU OF THE SITUATION. TIME AND FORM OF ANNOUNCEMENT TO THE PRESS AND TO THE TROOPS IS LEFT TO YOU. CONFIRM RECEIPT.

GOEBBELS

It is noted that Bormann's name had been unintentionally omitted from the message at the receiving end by Doenitz's cipher clerk.

But one individual in the bunker was determined to live. Martin Bormann had remained unflaggingly loyal to Hitler to the end; through hard work and dedication he had gained permanent leadership of the National Socialist Party and of its members and adherents in Germany and elsewhere in the world. It was his legacy from the Fuehrer. He had known that the Goebbels family had planned to die, and that Doenitz would leave office after surrender of the Third Reich. He was certain too that Seyss-Inquart, the Reich commissioner for the Netherlands who had succeeded von Ribbentrop as foreign minister, would not last the course; that he and he alone, Party Minister Bormann, would be left as leader, competent to command the global network of commerce he had painstakingly fostered. With this, Germany would move again into the forefront of world economic leadership.

At this moment Bormann's thoughts must have turned inward. It was a time for introspection. He knew he had bested his peers in one of the most grueling contests ever waged for control of the executive suite. Bormann had won out because of his Machiavellian proclivities, his attention to detail, his brutality to those who opposed him. With Hitler always behind him and the unlimited power which this represented, it was wise to step aside when the Reichsleiter made his moves, which were always well planned and never made on the spur of the moment. As one example, Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, Hitler's famed general of the North African and French campaigns, told of a brush he had with Martin Bormann during the Polish campaign of 1939. When Warsaw fell on September 19, Hitler
entered Danzig and broadcast to the Third Reich. Afterwards, he drove on a sightseeing trip to the port of Gdynia. The entry was narrow and crowded and as the Hitler motorcade approached Erwin Rommel, as temporary traffic controller, permitted only Hitler’s car and one other to pass through the barricades. The third car carried Reichsleiter Bormann, who was furious at being denied entry with his Fuehrer. “I am headquarters commandant,” Rommel told Bormann, “and you will do what I say.”

Bormann waited five years, Rommel was to observe, to take his revenge. Following the German defeat in Normandy in 1944, those in military command came under critical review at Hitler’s headquarters. When Rommel’s record of hostility to the regime came to Bormann’s desk, and he remembered being snubbed in Gdynia, he scribbled on the margin of the report which was to go to Hitler: “This confirms other, even worse facts that have already reached me.” It was the coup de grace for Rommel, who was later to be given his choice of death by cyanide capsule and a Field Marshal’s funeral in Berlin, or death by hanging and disgrace for his family.

As it became decision time for escape from the bunker, Bormann gathered together the personal papers that remained on his desk, everything else having long since been shipped in cartons via Munich to South America. He could hear a celebration in the eating halls of the bunker: piano music, dancing, and laughter as champagne was consumed, for with the death of Hitler the tension had been broken, and there was the frenzy of “What next?” for them all. In a way it was like the breakdown of other headquarters, as in Saigon years later, or in the White House after the formalities of President Nixon’s departure, when the staff felt that the symbolic power generated by the executive branch had been turned off, disconnected. But in the Fuehrerbunker, of those who survived and made their escape, many would later be rounded up by the Russians and sent to Moscow for imprisonment. The Soviet command didn’t know what to do with the bunker crowd, and prison, they reasoned, was as good a place as any until the Hitler-Bormann situation could be sorted out.

In the Fuehrerbunker, on the night of May 1, 1945, Bormann assembled the staff: high party officials, soldiers, women workers.

He informed them of the escape plan and the designated order of exodus. They were to move in compact groups through tunnels to the subway station in the Wilhelmsplatz, then to creep along the tracks to the Friedrichstrasse station and surface to the street, after which they were to make their way over the Weidendamm Bridge over the Spree, and to personal safety, to vanish among the general population. Instructing them all to be ready by 11:00 P.M., Bormann dismissed them.

In the privacy of his office, Bormann finished his own plans for evading surrender and trial. He had discussed his intended total escape in detail on the night of April 28-29 with his close confidant since 1941, Heinrich Mueller. Mueller was to become his security chief in South America; he was SS chief group leader and senior general of the Waffen SS. During the siege of Berlin, Mueller had not been quartered in the chancellery bunker. Regularly, he went there to report to Bormann, always returning to the Kurfuerstenstrasse building that Gestapo headquarters had moved to after being bombed out of the Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse offices. Its underground shelter was as safe as Hitler’s, and it had many advantages: secret rooms accessible only through ingeniously disguised doors, water and electricity, stores of food and medical supplies, and a radio transmitting room whose signal was powerful enough to reach Buenos Aires; also several tunnels leading to emergency exits. Here Mueller felt at ease, able to plan with care the flight of Bormann and himself out of reach of any Allied or Russian captors, beyond the borders of Germany, once they had extricated themselves from metropolitan Berlin.

Mueller’s last visit to the Fuehrerbunker had been on the night of April 28, when he had been summoned to interrogate SS Gruppenfuehrer Hermann Fegelein, who represented Himmler in the bunker, but who long before had changed personal allegiance to Hitler. To make the ties even closer, he had married Eva Braun’s sister, thus becoming in a way Hitler’s brother-in-law, if only for a brief time. On April 27 he had left the bunker for his residence in Charlottenburg, a fashionable suburb. Suspicions within the bunker were at fever pitch, so when his absence was noted Hitler took it to mean that he had been involved in Himmler’s personal peace plot, and sent two of his SS bodyguards to bring Fegelein back. Fegelein had as-
serted that he only wanted to live, not die; for this attitude, he was stripped of all rank and shot for desertion under fire and marginal complicity in Himmler's treachery.

As Russian shells could be heard pounding the concrete structure overhead, Bormann and Mueller continued to plan the details of their escape strategy. Bormann would move out with the middle group, and Mueller would go back to his own headquarters, and from there leave promptly for Schleswig-Holstein, where the two would be reunited. They shook hands, and Mueller climbed the fifty steps of the emergency exit, then crossed the chancellery gardens and disappeared into the night.

At about eleven o'clock, on the night of May 1, the first group moved through the exits and tunnels beneath Berlin. Bormann was in the center cluster. Once above ground, they saw their city in flames. Making their way to the Weidendamm Bridge, Bormann's group was hindered by a Soviet anti-tank barrier on the far side. They waited until German tanks appeared and destroyed the barrier, moving forward with the tanks. These few moments were absolutely critical in any historical discussion of the fate of Martin Bormann; either he perished at this point in time, or he didn't. This episode was aptly described by H. Trevor Roper in *The Last Days of Hitler*:

A miscellaneous group including Bormann, Stumpfegger (Hitler's surgeon), Kemper (Hitler's driver), Beetz (Hitler's second pilot), Axmann (Hitler's Youth leader), Naumann (Goebbels' assistant), Schwägermann (Goebbels' adjutant), and Raeh (Goebbels' driver). Some of these passed the barrier with the leading tank and reached the Ziegelstrasse about three hundred yards ahead; but there was a Panzerfaust (anti-tank bazooka fire) falling upon the tank, which caused a violent explosion. Beetz and Axmann were wounded; Kemper was knocked out and temporarily blinded; Bormann and Stumpfegger were thrown to the ground, perhaps unconscious, but escaped injury. The advance was frustrated, and the parties retreated once more to the bridge.

Professor Roper, as representative of both British and American intelligence services in the investigation surrounding the last recorded days of Hitler and Bormann, subsequently interviewed all surviving members of this group. His findings were that Bormann, along with Stumpfegger, made his way eastward along the Invalidenstrasse in the direction of Stettiner station. Here Artur Axmann caught up with them, later to testify that he found both men outstretched on their backs, moonlight on their faces (an odd description), both dead. But he admitted that he could not look at them closely; Russian fire had prevented it. He made his own way to safety, ultimately reaching the Bavarian Alps.

Thus, there is a sole known witness to the alleged deaths, and it is general belief in West German circles, as in the Israeli Mossad, that he falsified his testimony not only to protect Martin Bormann in general, but also in direct obedience to the orders of SS General Heinrich "Gestapo" Mueller.

Eleven years later Professor Roper again examined the revealed facts of the supposed demise of Martin Bormann, and stated that the evidence since had not altered his 1945 opinion.

Even in 1945 I had three witnesses who independently claimed to have accompanied Bormann in his attempted escape. One of these witnesses, Artur Axmann, claimed afterwards to have seen him dead. Whether we believe Axmann or not is entirely a matter of choice, for his work is unsupported by any other testimony... If he wished to protect Bormann against further search, his natural course would be to give false evidence of his death. This being so, I came, in 1945, to the only permissible conclusion, viz.: that Bormann had certainly survived the tank explosion but had possibly, though by no means certainly, been killed later that night. Such was the balance of evidence in 1945. How far is it altered by the new evidence of 1956?

The answer is, not at all. On the one hand both Kinge and Baur state that Bormann was killed in the tank explosion—or at least they say that they think he was killed, for, once again, they admit that the scene was confused and that they never saw the body.

On the other hand, Mengershausen (an officer of Hitler's bodyguard), declares firmly that Bormann was not killed in that explosion. He says that although Bormann was riding in a tank, it was not his tank which was blown up. And further, another witness has turned up since 1945 who states that he was with Bormann after the explosion. This is a former S.S. Major Joachim Tiburtius, who, in 1953, made a statement to a Swiss newspaper (*Der Bund* of Berne on February 17, 1953). In the confusion after the explosion Tiburtius says that he lost sight of Bormann, but afterwards he saw him again at the Hotel Atlas. "He had by then changed into civilian clothes. We pushed on together towards the Schießbauerdamm.
and the Albrechtstrasse. Then I finally lost sight of him. But he had as good a chance to escape as I had.”

In 1973 Roper wrote again in the New York Times: “I have my own reasons for thinking that Bormann may well have escaped to Italy and thence to South America.”

One source in West Germany, who has never been wrong in his disclosures to me about Bormann and his people, then and now, told me he had met up with Bormann in the early hours of May 2. Both having superficial wounds, they were being attended to in a German military first aid station at Konigs wurst Erhausen, 20 kilometers southeast of the chancellery. This Scharfuehrer of the Waffen SS, in his late teens, found himself seated alongside a familiar-looking, short, heavy-set man in a leather overcoat stripped of insignia. It was Martin Bormann; a shell fragment had injured his foot; he was resting after a doctor had treated it. The young sergeant said to Bormann and Bormann’s companion that he was on his way to the house of his uncle, a Luftwaffe pilot who had been killed in Russia. They were joined by another officer who had been listening to their conversation, and accompanied another one another through the dark streets to the house at Berlin Dahlem, Fontanestre, 9, grateful for the young man’s offer of a temporary refuge. This former German sergeant made the following statement to me as we sat on a public bench overlooking the Rhine, on April 18, 1971; he repeated it to me almost word for word in 1977:

The house was vacant, but I knew where the key was, so we went inside. Upstairs we changed into suits that were my uncle’s. We ate, then slept. We stayed inside for the next three days. None of us dared to go outside, because members of the German communist underground, led by Walter Ulbricht, were walking the streets as secret police for the Russians. After the third day, Reichsleiter Bormann, the officer who was his companion, and the third officer decided to leave. The third officer went one way; Bormann and his friend headed northwest into Mecklenburg, to a place where they said other clothing, some gold, and various currencies had been secreted for this escape. They left at night; I stayed in the house. Two days later they came back. They had reached Neuruppin, 60 kilometers northwest of Berlin, but had not been able to get through the Russian lines. They stayed on in the house with me for another three days, then left, this time headed for the British zone and Flensburg.

The SS sergeant said that much later he had met up with Bormann’s companion of those fateful ten days; he assured him that the party minister had made it safely through the British lines by following the Autobahn to the outskirts of Flensburg, where he was to make contact with Grand Admiral Doenitz.

Martin Bormann, in the interim, had met Heinrich Mueller, who had slipped out of Berlin earlier and was waiting in a prearranged safe house. Mueller told Bormann it would not be wise to meet with the new Reich president, who by now had carried out the unconditional surrender in both Rheims and Berlin. He predicted a war crimes trial of all German leaders, and said that Bormann would be inviting serious difficulty if he surfaced at this particular time. Martin Bormann secluded himself in a private German sanitarium in Schleswig-Holstein. The Gestapo chief, taking on the security of the new party minister and of his safe transportation to South America by assorted routes, made the exact plans that he would effect at precisely the right time.

Mueller had already initiated a strategy of deception to explain his own disappearance from prominent circles in Berlin. The week he slipped out of the German capital, his grieving family gathered for his “funeral.” A coffin was borne to a cemetery where it was buried with appropriate ceremony. The grave was marked with a headstone bearing the words “Our Dear Daddy,” Mueller’s name, his birthdate, and the date of his alleged death in Berlin in 1945.

Several years following this incident, an editor of a German news magazine, acting on an informer’s tip generated by the master deceptionist Mueller himself, from South America, obtained a court order in 1963, and the grave was opened. When the coffin in question was unearthed and opened, the editor and the attending officials found three skeletons, none remotely matching Heinrich Mueller’s short and thick-set measurements, or his markedly prominent forehead.

A deception plan for Bormann had been completed by Mueller in Berlin. Tops in police work and crafty beyond imagining, he provided for a matching skeleton and skull, complete with identical dental work, for future forensic experts to ponder
over and to reach conclusions that suited his purpose. Mueller was a former inspector of detectives in the Munich police department; he had been brought into the higher echelons of the Gestapo by Reinhard Heydrich because of his professionalism and brilliance. He had risen to the rank of SS chief group leader and senior general of the Waffen SS. The solution was elementary; his motivation was protection and enhancement of the highest authority of the state. To this principle, Mueller had been devoted for a decade as chief of police.

His scheme of substituting a stand-in for Martin Bormann’s body in the freight yards of Berlin was told to me three different times by three different individuals. One was an agent whose career was in the Secret Intelligence Service of the British Foreign Office, one served the Federal Republic of Germany, and one was a member of Mossad, the external service of Israeli intelligence. The first tip came over dinner in 1947, in the U.S. press club in Frankfurt. It was the day I returned from Berlin and a personal meeting with General Lucius D. Clay, military governor of the U.S. Zone of Occupation. General Clay had offered me the position of his civilian deputy, but I had turned it down with some reluctance, preferring to remain a European reporter for American newspapers. During the press club dinner, the British agent and I discussed the fascinating and bizarre disappearance of Reichsleiter Bormann; this source said flatly that Mueller had engineered Bormann’s escape, using the device of a concentration camp look-alike to throw future investigators off the scent. Many years later, in 1973, on a visit to Bonn, a conversation with one of General Gehlen’s aides in the Federal Republic intelligence service confirmed the 1947 British tip. The German stated: “The skull represented as Bormann’s is a fraud. Naturally the West German government wishes to bury the past and establish Bormann’s death once and for all. They have been constantly unsettled by continued revelations and scandals.” In 1978, an Israeli Mossad agent with a German specialization said to me that they had never closed the Bormann file in Tel Aviv. “We know he is in South America. We are not very compelled to find him because he was never personally involved in the ‘final solution.’” The Israeli added: “Bormann’s business was business, and from what I know personally he did a thorough job of shifting German assets away from the Third Reich.”

To piece my information together: General Heinrich Mueller initiated his Bormann scheme during the waning months of the war in the time frame when the Reichsleiter was moving to transfer German assets to safe havens in other places. At Concentration Camp Sachsenhausen he examined several inmates in the special elite group known as Sonderkommando, those who had been working in the German counterfeit operation of British pound notes and of other currencies. Documents prepared by them would also be used by SS men in their flight at war’s end (eventually, over 10,000 former German military made it to South America along escape routes ODESSA and Deutsche Hilfsverein). The Sonderkommando, placed in a special context within the camp, were treated as the skilled professionals they were—engravers, documents specialists, and quality printers—who had been rounded up from occupied countries and put to work for the Third Reich.

Peter Edel Hirschweh, who participated in this special work and survived, described it as follows:

All of the inmates, without any exceptions, were Jews or descendants of mixed marriages. We were “bearers of secrets.” Even if those two qualifications had not alone been sufficient to classify us as a death command, we received additional confirmation and proof through the following events: If some of the prisoners felt slightly ill, received an injury on the finger (while engraving) or the like they were taken to the doctor, heavily guarded, to receive treatment there; the physician was not allowed to talk to them at all. Persons who were seriously ill were not allowed to go to the infirmary, even if they could be cured there. They were isolated in the washroom and if this did not help, they were liquidated, i.e., killed.

When Heinrich Mueller visited Sachsenhausen he walked through the engraving, printing, and document areas looking for any inmates who might resemble Bormann. In one he noticed two individuals who did bear a resemblance in stature and facial structure to the Reichsleiter. He had them placed in separate confinement. Thereupon a special dental room was made ready for “treatment” of the two men. A party dentist was brought in to work over and over again on the mouth of each man, until his teeth, real and artificial, matched precisely the Reichsleiter’s. In April 1945, upon completion of these alterations, the two
victimized men were brought to the Kurfuerstenstrasse building to be held until needed. Dr. Blaschke had advised Mueller to use live inmates to insure a believable aging process for dentures and gums; hence the need for several months of preparation.

Exact dental fidelity was to play a major part in the identification of Hitler’s body by the invading Russians. It was to be of significance in Frankfurt twenty-eight years later, when the West German government staged a press conference to declare that they had “found Bormann’s skeleton proving he had died in Berlin’s freight yards May 1–2, 1945.”

Dr. Hugo Blaschke was the dentist who had served both Hitler and Bormann. He had offices in the fashionable professional area of Uhlanstrasse, but he always went to the chancellery for his two most important clients. Bormann had established a well-equipped dental office there, where Dr. Blaschke and his nurse, Fräulein Kaete Heusemann, would take care of the dental requirements of the Fuehrer and the Reichsleiter. The dental records for both were kept in the chancellery. When the Russians had threatened Berlin, Dr. Blaschke prudently moved his practice to Munich, but Fräulein Heusemann had stayed on. Hitler’s dental charts were never found, because Bormann had removed them from the chancellery files. However, the Russians, who had wanted complete identification of Hitler after the fall of Berlin, brought Fräulein Heusemann to Soviet headquarters. She had identified the dental fittings gathered in a cigar box as belonging to Adolf Hitler. This was confirmed by the dental technician, Fritz Echtmann, who had made the fittings for Hitler on order of Dr. Blaschke.

Once they had made the identifications, both were shipped off to Moscow, remaining there in prison so that they could not communicate with others for several years. They were classified by the Russians as among the chancellery group who had survived the bunker; they would spend years in Russian prisons and slave camps until the Kremlin leaders decided how to handle their public announcement of Hitler’s death—suicide in the bunker, or escape to Spain and South America, as Stalin first believed.

In Bormann’s case, the problem was more complex, more challenging. Yet under Mueller’s skillful guidance, two bodies were planted; their discovery was made possible when an SS man, acting on Mueller’s orders, leaked the information to a Stern magazine editor as part of a ploy to “prove” that Bormann had died in the Berlin freight yard. The stand-ins for Bormann were two unfortunates from Concentration Camp Sachsenhausen, who had been killed gently in the Gestapo basement secret chambers with cyanide spray blown from a cigarette lighter (a killing device used later by the KGB in 1957 and 1959 against Lev Rebet and Stephen Bandera, two leaders of the Ukrainian émigrés in Munich). At Gestapo headquarters, the night of April 30, the bodies were taken by a special SS team to the freight yards near the Weidendamm Bridge and buried not too deep beneath rubble in two different areas. The Gestapo squad then made a hurried retreat from Berlin, joining their leader, SS Senior General Heinrich Mueller, in Flensburg.

The funeral and burial caper was to be a Mueller trademark throughout the years of searching for Martin Bormann. The Mossad was to point out that they have been witnesses over the years to the exhumation of six skeletons, two in Berlin and four in South America, purported to be that of Martin Bormann. All turned out to be those of others, although in Frankfurt in 1973 the dental technician, Fritz Echtmann, after years as a Russian prisoner, was to say that the dental work found in the skull of the skeleton declared to be the remains of Bormann resembled those fittings he had worked on in 1944. Simon Wiesenthal, director of the Jewish Documentation Center in Vienna, had been invited to Frankfurt by West German authorities who were presenting the press event, with the CIA in the background. He said that, while the skull resembled Bormann’s, he doubted it was Bormann. Still, Heinrich Mueller had done his job well, and from South America he pointed the Bonn government’s investigators through intermediaries toward this second planted Bormann skeleton. So my sources state; the fabrications of 1945 continue to provide the party minister with his “passport to freedom.”

The full surrender of all German forces was signed at Rheims, France, on May 7, 1945, and I was a witness to that historic event. Reich President Doenitz had sent both Admiral von Friedeburg and General Alfred Jodl as his representatives to General Eisenhower’s Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expedi-
tionary Force, operating out of a red brick building that in peacetime was a school for girls. The two German notables arrived on May 6 for preliminary discussions. They played for time, knowing that each hour gained would enable their countrymen on the Eastern Front to retreat further into Germany until they could surrender to British or American forces. There was to be no separate surrender; it was now all or nothing, and General Eisenhower had imposed a time limit of May 7 on the Germans for general and total capitulation. General Jodl reported to Doenitz: "General Eisenhower insists that we sign today. If not, the Allied fronts will be closed to persons seeking to surrender individually. I see no alternative: chaos or signature. I ask you, to confirm to me immediately by wireless that I have full powers to sign capitulation."

This authorization was duly received, and in a small lecture hall on the second floor of the school building, General Jodl signed the instrument of unconditional surrender, at 2:41 on the morning of May 7. Lieutenant General Bedell Smith signed on behalf of General Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander, with British, French, and Russian officers as witnesses.

After General Jodl had placed his signature on the documents, he addressed the senior Allied officers present. He asked for a show of compassion to the German people, who had suffered so much during this war. No one spoke during his statement, for those listening to the plea were professionals too and knew the shattering emotions that both former antagonists were undergoing as they laid down the German sword and authorized the capitulation of their armed forces on land and on the high seas. Admiral von Friedeburg was later to take his life.

General Jodl then rose and walked from the room, along a

At this instant, I intruded in Jodl’s tightly controlled self-possession, asking him, “General, did Martin Bormann make it safely out of Berlin?” The Nazi leader, surprised at this query, replied readily and in a barely audible tone, “Of course. He is a natural survivor.” Then he was gone, down the staircase, to the staff car outside that took them back to Grand Admiral Doenitz.

Two days after this event, in the modest house on Fontanestere, 9, Party Minister Martin Bormann was calculating how to slip through the British lines to Flensburg. Peril and uncertainty surely would be ahead before he reached his destination—Buenos Aires. He remained methodical and matter-of-fact as he planned his departure from Berlin, although only days before he had failed to penetrate the Russian lines to Schleswig-Holstein. He believed firmly in his destiny and was convinced that he would rendezvous with General Mueller in the safe house they had agreed upon.

“It was early morning when Bormann left the house,” related my Waffen SS source, who, as I said earlier, remained behind, plotting his own best course. Only nineteen, he yearned to reach Bonn and look out for his widowed mother. He went on: “Bormann was accompanied by the aide who had escaped with him from the Fuehrerbunker the night of May 1–2, and both men set off along the autobahn. Months later I happened to meet the aide in Frankfurt. He remarked, ‘We passed through British lines without trouble, without even being noticed, just another two shabbily dressed men. I left the party minister with General Mueller, and went back to Frankfurt.’”

This SS source...
squashed by the Bundesamt fur Verfassungsschutz, the West German equivalent of the FBI. The reason given: “It was not in the national interest.” If the story were published, Quick would be put out of business and the five reporters jailed. The matter had gone to the highest levels of government in Bonn where the decision had been made. This SS veteran admires “Fuehrer Bormann” and worked for him for a while in South America; but even so, were he to be indiscreet and draw attention to himself, he might be signing his own death warrant.