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Last Days Of Hitler And Co.

Mann, Klaus

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What's the lowdown on this 'hara-kiri' business?"

Last Days Of Hitler And Co.

By Cpl. KLAUS MANN
Staff Writer

For The Nazi Leaders, There Is
Only Death In Action Or Suicide

REALITY has always been more fantastic than fiction. No Shakespeare, no Balzac could possibly invent as breath-takingly dramatic a situation as that now developing in the Bavarian and Austrian Alps, in and around Hitler's mountain retreat, the Berghof, near Berchtesgaden.

The Fuehrer has declared, dozens of times that he will never surrender. But he must know that Germany is beaten, that his Third Reich is lost, whether he surrenders or not. "I do not think that there will be a negotiated unconditional surrender but an imposed one," General Dwight D. Eisenhower put it only last week. "We shall have to take over the country by marching in from west and east, and then surrender will have taken place." When that happens, when the Allied Armies, already in the heart of Germany, simply take over the country, what will happen to those who still keep shouting that they will never surrender?

THE NAZI chieftains are nothing if not realists. They know they are doomed. They realize that they will not be permitted, after their final defeat, to live out their lives in dignity and comfort, as did Napoleon in St. Helena or Wilhelm II at Doorn. For them there must be fierce, fanatical determination to postpone the day of judgment as long as possible—no matter what the consequences for their Fatherland.

There is not much time left to them. The area in which they still enjoy relative safety (if we disregard the ubiquitous danger of air raids) becomes smaller and smaller. Wherever they may feel secure today, the Anglo-American or Russian armies are likely to catch up with them tomorrow. Did it not seem a reasonable idea to shift certain governmental offices from endangered Berlin to Nuremberg? But Nuremberg today is almost as much in danger as was Berlin two weeks ago. For how many weeks or days will they be safe at Berchtesgaden?

IF PERSISTENT reports can be credited at all, from all corners of the collapsing Third Reich desperate party officials are today rushing to the temporary shelter of Hitler's supposedly unbreakable mountain fortress. Joachim von Ribbentrop has a castle near Salzburg, not far away, where the panicky Nazi elite can find temporary refuge. According to recent reports, Heinrich Himmler's new personal headquarters, too, is at Salzburg, while his Gestapo office has moved to Innsbruck. A short time before, one of those always well-informed Swedish travelers reported that Himmler had picked the ancient German city of Weimar as his residence, but that the Allies had found out his whereabouts and promptly bombarded the complex of villas and office buildings occupied by the chief of the Gestapo. Herr Himmler, it is said, has since joined Frau Himmler in the Austrian Alps. Another visitor to the Salzburg area is Frau Hermann Goering.

As for Goering himself, he is said to spend most of his time at Karinhall—a sumptuous estate near Berlin, named after the Reich Marshal's first wife. Once the most powerful man in the Reich, next to Hitler, Goering has of late more or less dropped out of the picture. People who have recently returned from Germany describe him as a veritable wreck, mentally as well as physically—worrying all day long over the possibility that he may be deprived of the collection of jewels, paintings and other treasures he stole from a looted continent. They say his mind is slightly deranged. It seems likely that Goering may have relapsed into his old habit of taking narcotics.

The Reich Marshal, who collected estates as he did medals and works of art, has just lost one of his finest possessions—Rominten Forest in East Prussia, a large, lavish affair of 255 square miles, recently captured by the

Russians. He still has several other castles and country houses left, however—including one at Berchtesgaden. It could be that Hermann, decorations, brocade robes, antique swords and all, is already on his way to this last refuge of the supermen.

ALFRED Rosenberg, author of the Nazi gospel, *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*, and official party theoretician, and Dr. Goebbels, supreme boss of the Berlin district and Minister for Propaganda and Enlightenment, are still apparently holding out in the Reich capital—the former contributing regularly his ponderous editorials to Hitler's own newspaper, *Der Voelkische Beobachter*; the latter, making speeches, broadcasting, yelling and raving. He is telling whoppers today such as no man has told before. His swan song will doubtless be an unequalled masterpiece of distortion and trickery.

But how much longer will those two be able to carry on their activities in Berlin? The Russians are coming and the Americans are not far away. Without doubt there are already two cozy Berghof apartments prepared for Herr Goebbels and Rosenberg.

THERE will be more of them trekking to the mountain retreat. Mussolini may come soon from northern Italy where the days of his shadow regime are numbered. The wretched Pierre Laval may show up with his senile boss, Marshal Henri Petain. All the quislings will probably arrive in due time—Quisling himself of Norway, Degrelle of Belgium, Mussert of The Netherlands, and all the gentlemen from the Balkans. This nightmarish gathering of failures and traitors promise quite a party.

What conversations are going on in this desperate group? What are they thinking about? What fears and sus-

picious do they conceal from each other? What plans are they making?

Neutral reports speak of powerful, especially built planes kept ready for any emergency at the Berchtesgaden secret airport. But there is no place for them to go. There is no escape. All frontiers are closed. All the countries of the world have now committed themselves not to admit any Nazi fugitives. There were frequent stories about Hitler agents rushing to Argentina with the double purpose of creating a storage plant for German capital and of preparing the terrain for the eventual arrival of their bosses. But that South American nation has at long last declared war against Germany and Japan.

THERE only remains Japan. According to a recent report from Moscow, "Tokyo expects Hitler, Himmler, and Mussolini to arrive there at almost any moment." But the two-fold question remains, first, whether the Nazi leaders would like to go to Japan and, second, whether they would be welcome to the Japanese. Both questions must be answered in the negative. The Germans and the Japanese have never trusted each other. To Hitler, champion of racial doctrines, it would be an almost unbearable humiliation to be at the mercy of his Asiatic ally.

Some may try to change their identities and their appearances and go underground, either within the Reich or abroad. But even the most skillful plastic surgeon may not prove able to make such notorious characters as Hitler, Goebbels, Goering, and Mussolini unrecognizable.

UNLESS they choose to hide like ordinary criminals, there is only one thing these stranded adventurers can do—to shoot it out in Berchtesgaden and the surrounding area, and to die there in action or commit suicide. There is only one question they can read in each other's eyes: "How many days? How many weeks? When will they catch up with us?" And when Hitler hurls his old, desperate formula—"I will not surrender"—the only answer must be a hollow echo from the Alps... "This is the end... the end."