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Death Meant Escape From Outraged World For Hitler.

Mann, Klaus

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Three Men With A Plan



Il Duce and his former mistress—hung by their heels.

Death Meant Escape From Outraged World For Hitler

By Cpl. KLAUS MANN
Staff Writer

HE WAS not a great man. He was not great at all; yet he assumed great power. Even though lacking in stature and genius, he was able to terrorize a continent and to challenge the whole civilized world.

Hitler used to boast that his Third Reich would last forever—at least for a thousand years. Actually he ruled Germany for 12 years and 90 days—from January 30, 1933, the date of his appointment as Chancellor, until May 1, 1945, the day on which the German radio announced his death. It may seem a comparatively short time; it is incredibly long, however, considering the character of this particular regime and this particular leader.

Incredible is the word; there is indeed something incredible about Hitler's case. But if the story of the Nazi Fuehrer is unbelievable, it is also instructive and thought-provoking. Future generations will be puzzled and shocked by his saga of crime and folly. As a lesson and warning, the Third Reich and its master may indeed survive the next thousand years to come.

HOW WAS it possible? This question will be asked by future generations. What enabled a neurotic clown to gain control over the lives of millions? What was the secret behind his staggering, disastrous career?

Future historians may turn for an answer to Hitler's autobiography and confession of faith, *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle). But they will be disappointed. The long story which Hitler dictated to his friend Rudolf Hess at the Bavarian fortress of Landsberg, in 1924, offers very little relevant information. An agglomeration of nationalistic clichés and venomous invectives, it contains hardly any original thoughts. As for Hitler's prose, all that can be said about it is, that he treated the German language as roughly as he did his political opponents. What *Mein Kampf* proves if anything, is just its author's illiteracy and conceit.

WHAT about his much-vaunted oratorical gift? When I heard Hitler for the first time, back in the early 20s, his name didn't mean much to me; it was just by chance, out of idle curiosity, that I attended the show of this obscure agitator in a Munich beer cellar. His voice was unpleasantly hoarse; he spoke German with the clumsily affected accent of a provincial Austrian attempting to appear "cultured;" what he said made no sense. Shouting and gesticulating in a constant paroxysm of fury, he hurled monotonous and absurd accusations against individuals

and whole nations, religious groups, political parties and foreign governments. The gist of his harangue was the two-fold claim that Germany had not really lost the war but had been cheated out of victory by a treacherous plot, and that he, the speaker, was the man chosen by Providence to restore the Fatherland's greatness and glory. It was a dreary performance.

The only remarkable thing about the exhibition was the reaction of the audience. They took him seriously. They applauded. Were they mad or hypnotized? Had some evil spell deprived them of all judgment and common sense, to applaud this cataract of distasteful rant and rubbish? Was it possible that they believed in his grotesque promises and impossible lies?

Incredible! That's what I felt whenever I witnessed one of his rhetorical outbursts. It was beyond comprehension that any public speaker could get away with such foul language and such trite theatrical tricks. Yet he got away with it. The number of his followers grew. It took him just a few years to establish himself as the leader of Germany's strongest, most dynamic political party.

IT MUST have been about that time—shortly after his sensational victory in the Reichstag elections of 1930—that I happened to sit next to him in a Munich tea room. It was not one of his usual hang-outs—otherwise I would have avoided going there. He just dropped by, as he explained to the awestruck waitress, because friends had told him that this particular place had the best pastry in town. He was exceedingly fond of sweets. While I kept watching him at close range, he wolfed astounding quantities of strawberry tarts and Viennese strudel.

I did not like his face. Of sallow complexion and lacking in clear-cut contours, it had a certain flabby, indeed, spongy quality which was most unappetizing. In this at once soft and brutal physiognomy, the eyes had a strangely dead, hazy gaze. There was something sightless about his eyes. I remembered that he had been gassed and temporarily blinded during the war. But also I remembered that the fixed and absent-minded look of eyes was characteristic of certain pathological egocentric types. My pastry-devouring neighbor had the terrible eyes of a man who is physically incapable of seeing anything except what he wants to swallow—be it huge portion of whipped cream or a country.

THERE were three or four other men with him—brown-shirted non-entities with brutal jaws and necks. The whole gang was in high spirits—as nat-

Final Chapter For Mussolini Written By His Countrymen

(Stars and Stripes correspondent Sgt. Stan Swinton and INS correspondent Rita Hume were the first two Allied reporters to reach Milan following its liberation by Italian Patriots and the first to witness the death scene of Mussolini and his Fascist chiefs. His eye-witness account, delayed in transit, is told here.)

By Sgt. STAN SWINTON
Staff Writer

MILAN, SUNDAY, APRIL 29

THE WAXEN-FACED corpse of Benito Mussolini is hanging by the heels in Piazza Quindici Martiri. He was shot through the forehead by Italian Patriots in summary execution of a judgment passed in the hearts and minds of the free peoples of the world.

Hanging beside her lover is the still beautiful body of Claretta Petacci, blood smeared the bare V of her breasts. Flanking them on both sides are the lifeless forms of five of the chief creators of Fascism. Sprawled on the blood-stained concrete are 11 other bodies.

Thousands upon thousands of Milanese jam the Piazza as these words are written. In silence they stare toward the grisly row of corpses strung from the skeleton of a half-completed gasoline station by a wire twisted around each pair of ankles.

There are no other Americans or British in the whole vast throng except International News Service correspondent Rita Hume. With a Patriot bodyguard we drove past 5th Army roadblocks and over 20 miles of Partisan-held roads to reach Milan, which has been free of the enemy since the greatest Patriot uprising in Italian history liberated the great industrial center four days ago.

MUSSOLINI is clad in blue-green riding breeches and a white woolen undershirt. His face is expressionless, his hands half clenched. There is a gaping wound in the back of his close-shaven head where a slug emerged, the hole widened by a kick from

the foot of a red-scarfed Patriot just before the body was strung up.

Twenty-six-year-old Claretta is clad in a brown suit. The blouse has fallen away to show a blue slip. Her legs are sheathed in sheer, silk stockings. In death a Patriot made a last gesture to her modesty, twisting the woolen skirt so it would not fall away from her slim hips.

Hanging beside Il Duce and his mistress are Pavolini, secretary of the Fascist party; Starace, his predecessor; Gelormini, chief of the Fascist Republican Youth Organization; General Teruzzi, chief of the Fascist military; Minister of the Interior Zerbino and sub-secretary Barracu.

Roberto Farinacci, the number two man of Fascism, is not here, but he is dead. He was executed last night in the commune of Vermercate and U. S. combat officers passing through the town said he was buried this morning. With the exception of Edda Mussolini Ciano, virtually every leading Italian Fascist is dead or a captive.

IL DUCE and his satellites were captured at Dongo, a village on the western shore of Lake Como. The new chief of police there, in an interview yesterday, said that the father of Fascism was recognized by a sergeant of the Italian customs border guards when he drove toward the Swiss border in a convoy of 30 German lorries filled with fleeing Blackshirts. Mussolini himself had a Wehrmacht greatcoat thrown over his Italian uniform. Partisans seized him without a fight and took him to a secret hideout.

Apparently Mussolini was alive as late as yesterday afternoon. Two Partisans offered to guide me to his hiding place for an interview but when we reached it at dusk, guards said Mussolini had been taken away at that time. Claretta was said to be alive but admission to her presence was refused.

Only a week ago Mussolini came out of the Blackshirt stronghold where 3,000 of his men were serving as a bodyguard. The United States consul at

"Shouting and gesticulating in a constant paroxysm of fury . . ."

