

Hitler's Last Days



A Birthday Celebration

Once Hitler descended into the Berlin bunker, he rarely left. One of the few times he did, however, was on April 20, 1945 — his 56th birthday. In the garden just outside the bunker, Hitler decorated 20 Hitler Youths-turned-soldiers. Here he shakes hands with Alfred Czech, a 12-year-old Hitler Youth soldier, after the young veteran of battles in Pomerania and upper and lower Silesia was awarded the Iron Cross. After the ceremony, Hitler returned to his underground home, which some generals regarded as "a madhouse being run by the inmates."



"... she was the lady."

One of the most daring attempts by anyone to reach the Berlin bunker was made by General Robert Ritter von Greim and his mistress, Hanna Reitsch. Bombers were overhead and shrapnel filled the air, but Hitler had requested the presence of von Greim, so not making the attempt was out of the question. Few could imagine anyone surviving the journey, until it was realized that Hanna Reitsch, aviatrix and accomplished wartime test pilot, would be accompanying von Greim. As one pilot remarked, "If anyone could sneak a plane into Berlin, she was the lady." Reitsch and von Greim arrived April 27. While in the bunker, Hanna hoped to fly the children of propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels, who'd been living there with their parents, out of Berlin to safety. That desire would never be fulfilled. Here, at an earlier date, Hitler presents Reitsch with the Iron Cross for her service in the development of aircraft armament instruments.



Eva Braun

Eva Braun met Hitler when she was working as an assistant for Hitler's personal photographer. From that moment she became obsessively devoted to the dictator. On Saturday, April 28, 1945, Eva and Hitler married in the bunker map room. Somewhat appropriately, the bride wore black. Here, during happier times, Eva and Hitler deceptively appear to be an average middle-class couple having dinner together. This photo was taken at the Berghof, Hitler's mountain retreat in the Bavarian Alps.



Last Will and Testament

This is one of the last pictures taken of Adolf Hitler in his bunker in Berlin in 1945 as he shakes hands with Col. Gen. Ferdinand Schoerner, appointed commander in chief of the nonexistent Wehrmacht in Hitler's last will and testament. In the doorway stands Hitler's adjutant, Julius Schaub. Planning to commit suicide since he'd entered the bunker, the day after his wedding Hitler penned his last will and testament. Most of the rambling document tried to blame the war on "international politicians who either come from Jewish stock or [were] agents of Jewish interests."



Cyanide and Pistols

Eva Braun had always known that when the time came she would willingly die with her Fuehrer. Mid-afternoon on April 30, they both entered Hitler's living room. According to those who entered the room an hour later, Hitler and Eva were found sitting on this couch. Hitler was slumped over, and blood spilled over the arm of the couch. Eva was sitting at the other end. Hitler had killed himself by biting down on a cyanide capsule while pulling the trigger of a gun aimed at his head. Eva only used the cyanide capsule. Her pistol still lay on the table before her. Here, American soldiers take a close look at the couch. Bloodstains are visible on the arm.



Hitler's "Tombstone"

A view of the courtyard of the New Reich Chancellery, where it is reported that the bodies of Hitler and Eva Braun, his mistress, were burned after their suicides. Fearing what the Russians would do to his body, Hitler had left explicit instructions to burn his body to ashes. But as with most great plans, things did not exactly go smoothly. Trying to ignite the bodies of Eva and Hitler in the courtyard while bombs and shrapnel filled the air was no easy task. Scurrying between bomb bursts, Hitler's devotees flicked lighted matches on the corpses, which did nothing. Finally, the group got the bright idea of twisting wads of paper together and lighting this handmade flare. Each floated their missile toward the bodies. A blue flame eventually ignited, but even though the flames were impressive, cremation is not an easy matter and the bodies of Eva and Hitler were never totally consumed.



A Family Portrait

Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels brought his wife, Magda, and their six children with him to the bunker. The children became the delight of the inmates, a diversion from the dreariness and boredom of bunker life. But after Hitler's death, in what can only be described as something written for a horror story, Magda killed her children using cyanide capsules. While Joseph once commented, "Neither my wife, nor a single one of my offspring, will be among the survivors of the coming debacle," it was Magda who did the dirty work. Taking her children into a small room as if to tuck them into bed for the night, Magda gave each a cyanide capsule. Later, evidence of the remains showed that in all probability the five youngest died unknowingly, while the eldest had put up a fight.

Another Attempted Cremation

Like Hitler, Joseph and Magda Goebbels were cremated. The bodies of their six children remained in the bunker. They were found by Russian soldiers when Berlin fell to the Allies.



The Breakout

One thing that can be said for sure about Martin Bormann is that most people in or out of the bunker disliked him. Power-hungry and manipulative, he wheedled his way into a powerful position and the good graces of Hitler. Once Hitler was dead, Bormann and everyone remaining in the bunker decided it was time to leave before the Soviets found their hideout, as capturing this group of Third Reich higher-ups would be a prize catch. The plan was to get outside the Soviet ring that encircled Berlin. Creeping through the rubble and empty subway tunnels, the group passed a landscape of gutted buildings, fire and sulfurous clouds. Although in the postwar hysteria rumors circulated that Bormann had escaped and was living a life of luxury in South America, in all probability he was killed during the breakout.



Burying the Past

Allied experts examine Hitler's bunker. Soon after Berlin collapsed, the bunker was blown up by the Red Army.



The Remains of the Bunker

Sightseers walk amid the ruins of Hitler's bunker, sometimes referred to as Hitler's "tombstone," after a detachment of Soviet army engineers blew it up on Dec. 11, 1947. The ventilating tower of the shelter (a cylinder with a conical top) is at right. Stones from the shattered bunker, where Hitler and his mistress, Eva Braun, reportedly committed suicide, splattered the broken walls of the Reich Chancellery (background), and a few landed in the middle of the huge room that once was Hitler's office.