

*Documentary history of an Alpine
tragedy during the last convulsions
of World War II.*

RODERICK "STEVE" HALL

Anthony Quibble

The Steve Hall story was twice told publicly during General Donovan's drive in 1945 to build support for continuing the OSS in peacetime,¹ but in both tellings the form was summary, the information was incomplete and in part mistaken, and the drama was lost among the many other grim and heroic war's-end tales. Besides, the documents in the OSS archives tell it best by themselves, without the intrusion of an outsider. That is what follows.

* * *

On the train returning
to Camp Adair, Oregon
September 14, 1943

Dear Mr. Stebbins,

It seems to me, who knows nothing about your organization [OSS], that finding an agent with the necessary personal accouterments to go to Cortina [on the southeast approaches to the Brenner pass] and carry out missions of sabotage, political organization, reconnaissance, or whatever is desired would be difficult. Even if he was a European, he would encounter official questioning at every turn now, with danger of exposure each time. And traveling by land, how could he carry sufficient explosive and tools to effect sabotage himself, if all other plans failed?

These obstacles could, of course, be overcome one way or another; but here is my suggestion, based on the premise that the sabotage is more important in the near future than political organization:

Drop a man by parachute on the open country between Pocol and the Falzarego Pass and drop enough Army "Mountain Rations" and

¹In *Sub Rosa*, by Stewart Alsop and Thomas Braden (New York, 1945), and more briefly in "Some Affairs of Honor," by William L. White, *Readers' Digest*, December 1945.

personal equipment to sustain him indefinitely in the peaks, if necessary. Drop TNT and a tool kit. I believe one could get away with it, if the jump was made in the early dawn when mist rises profusely over the terrain, or through a snow fall.

This man, if he was a good rock and snow climber, and skier, would have no trouble in moving about the valley unnoticed even in the daytime. The matter of tracks in the snow is of no consequence; paths and brooks could cover his movements, and he could always take to the mountain rock.

Operating even under adverse conditions, this man, I believe, could block the Ampezzo highway and railroad beyond use during the winter, anyway, within 3 days after he landed. It should be possible for him to blow out the Drava River roads within another 10 days. Thereafter he could work on whatever opportunities presented themselves.

I feel sure he would not have to search out anti-Nazi elements for laying the plans for continued sabotage: they would come to him. Of course, the problem of how he would get out and save his own skin is all a matter of chance and circumstance. Perhaps he would have to perch on the peak of Antelao nibbling concentrated chocolate until German capitulation.

I would be willing to do the job—and I think I could. Here are my qualifications:

Trained in military demolitions.

Trained in mapping, reconnaissance, communications, and similar subjects (am battalion S-2).

Familiar with the Val Ampezzo, particularly the little-known paths and minor terrain features, from walks and skiing. Skilled in rock and snow climbing, with 15 years experience on the cliffs and snow of N.E., in Wyoming (Grand Tetons), and Cortina. . . .

Expert rifle and pistol shot since 1930—Nat'l Rifle Association and Army.

Physically: somewhat above average endurance; accustomed to living in the open under all



"Steve" Hall

~~OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~

conditions; no major operations, illnesses or frailties; 28 years of age.

Education: . . . Am no linguist, but . . . picked up enough Italian in 5 days at Cortina to get about conveniently . . .

Personal situation: unmarried, . . . ready to go anytime under any circumstances that augur success.

Cordially yours,

R.S.G. Hall

2nd Lt. 270 Engr. (c) Bn.
Camp Adair, Oregon

* * *

AIR RESUPPLY

2677TH REGIMENT PROV

A.P.O. 534

[OSS Hq. in Florence, Italy]

31 July 1944

Dear Captain Suhling,

Our operation against that certain supply route is all ready to shove off, and in fact we may be gone by the time you read this. I'm sure you will never regret the interest and "push" you gave it. The scheme has expanded quite a bit since its first conception, owing to the favorable Partisan conditions in the area, and we have high hopes of accomplishing things on a large scale. The principal aims now are: tactical and supply liaison with a very large and well-organized Partisan military group in the area; complete blocking of the critical supply routes, both R.R. and highway, destruction of locomotives, trucks, and fuel stocks; establishment of a courier route into Austria; gathering, through a net to be set up, as much military intelligence as possible, with special attention to the following items: troop and supply movement and/or disposition; location of German command headquarters; German plans for using gas (this has appeared in reports of our agents very recently); results of air bombing. I imagine we may also have the opportunity to gather info on the political situation and on persons suitable to take over local government in event of troop occupation or German capitulation.

~~OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~

47

~~OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~

"Steve" Hall

. . . .

The personnel for the operation are: Capt. Lloyd G. Smith, in command; 1st Lt. Joseph Lukitsch; myself; radio operator Stanley Sbeig (Navy specialist); and T-3 Victor Malaspino. . . . We're going in with several thousand pounds of equipment for the Partisan group, and expect to re-order by radio quite a bit more. Food is not included, as we shall live off the land.

Well, I guess that's all there is to tell about it. It has certainly been a great pleasure knowing you, sir, and I hope we see each other again before long.

Best wishes,
Steve

. . . .

P.S. If you don't mind a suggestion, sir, I believe that all-around promotion of our enlisted men would prevent a heap of disciplinary troubles: some of these boys are getting pretty desperate, and Lord knows most of them have done a very faithful job. . . .

* * *

Hallowe'en
Oct. 31, 1944
Andrich,
Province of Cadore,
Italy.

Dear Mother and Family,

Your last letters, all written in July and August, arrived in a bunch—by parachute! The heavy cases of arms and explosives and supplies came floating down silently through the night; and among them was a package (with its own 'chute) which carried all the news from home. . . . For security reasons I had to burn all the mail, much as I hated to, keeping only the birthday cards, which I have carried with me ever since.

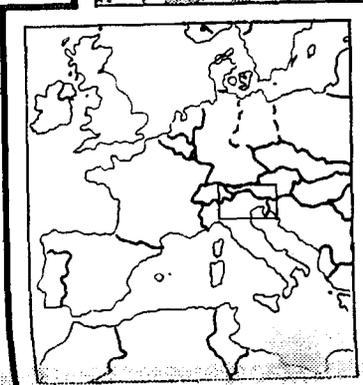
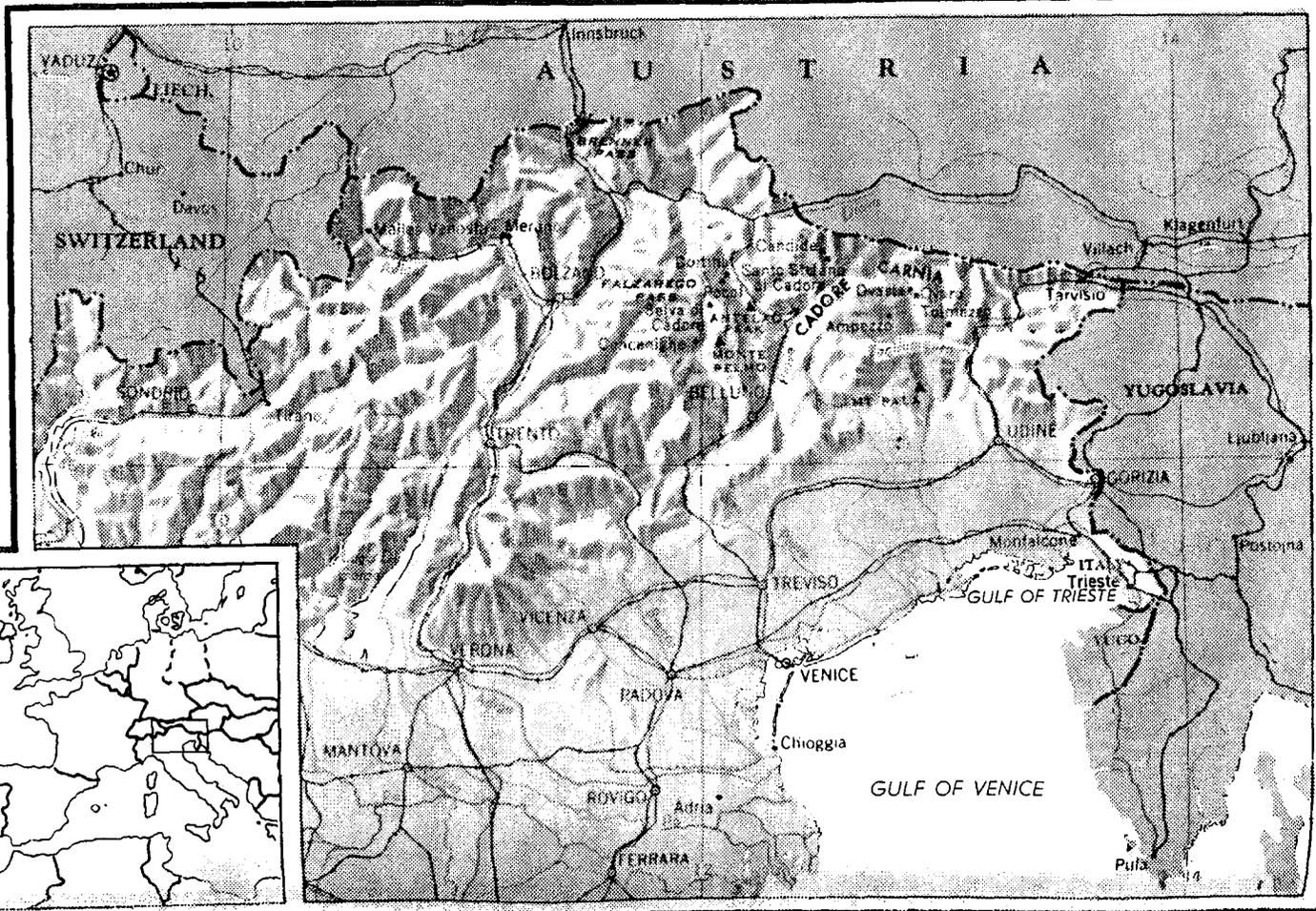
You see, we were some 250 miles behind the front in Italy and actually right up against the border of Germany itself—in the Italian Alps where, as you know, I'd always wanted to fight my tiny part of this war, anyway. The letters appeared out of the dark over a wide place in the bed of the Tagliamento River near a village called

Enemonzo, about 10 miles east of Ampezzo and the same distance west of Tolmezzo. At Tolmezzo were 11,000 Nazi troops and Mongoloids from Turkestan, picked up in the German retreat from the Caspian and now serving as mercenaries.

We used the river flats for over 12 supply drops, although our flaming signal fires were in full sight of Tolmezzo, on the nights when we got the signal over the regular commercial program from London to expect a planeload. To get to the dropping zone we rode in a huge truck (captured from the Nazis) which roared down thru the winding gorges of the Tagliamento at terrific speed from Ovasta. We went so fast because it was a race to a certain road park. We had to make it before the Germans did, if they should ever get it into their thick skulls to investigate what was going on. I believe they knew, but psychology was on our side: they imagined our Partisan bands of Italian patriots so strong that any attack by them would be suicidal. Actually we had less than 1,000 men in our command, and the Nazi waited 'til he had the garrison in Tolmezzo built up to 14,000 men before he struck. But that happened much later.

At Ovasta, a medieval hamlet lodged on a shelf overlooking the river and ringed round by the gigantic spears and flakes of the Carnic Alps, we had our "Base" Headquarters. We had a powerful short wave set with which to communicate with Army Hq. way to the south; and a room or two; and a tobacco supply composed of old butts and cornsilk. I was at the Base very little, spending my time in long swings—by trail, or motorcycle, or bicycle, or climbing rope—deep into zones crawling with Germans but where unarmed groups of patriots waited for help. So my returns to Base were always occasions for mutual celebration; it was good to get back to a bed and hot food, after sleeping in hay barns or caves and eating mushrooms and cold cornmeal, with an occasional squirrel thrown in.

The days went very fast then. At Base there was corn on the cob and American radio programs, and "Smitty" (Major Lloyd G. Smith, State College, Pa.) had arranged a deal with a pre-war ice cream freezer in Ovara, so we had ice cream now and then—all we had to do was climb down 1,500' to the valley floor and then climb up again. . . . The peaks are plated with ice now, there are drifts in the passes and snow powderings in the valleys. [But] August, everything was green and warm—we took our showers in waterfalls, went roaring up and down the village streets singing Yankee songs to the delighted



OFFICIAL USE ONLY

"Steve" Hall

OFFICIAL USE ONLY

grins of the war-weary people, who were fed to the ears with the grim and cruel Nazi soldiers.

You know how long I'd worked on this Alps thing—well, I finally sold it to GHQ (that's what all the flying around Italy was about). We put together a team of five. . . . Smitty was to organize and direct Partisans in Carnia; and I was to do same in Cadore, having also the mission of closing the Cortina road. Once inside German-occupied territory, we were entirely on our own, as autonomous as soldiers-of-fortune in a Chinese war or banana republic revolution. But I guess Gen. Devers, and then Gen. Alexander, had faith in us because they okayed the deal, 100%, one afternoon on the shores of Lake Bolsena, where I'd gone to explain the project one afternoon. Of course it wasn't as easy as that. The project had to be drafted as carefully as a case before the Supreme Court, and the preparations were as detailed as an expedition in Everest: maps, sleeping bags, foreign money, climbing gear, radio cyphers, medicine, and just about a thousand damn things—all weighed and triple-checked.

Finally, the night of August 1st, we gathered under the wing of a big 4-motored Lancaster at Brindisi airport. We had on "strip-tease" suits, against the cold at 10,000 feet, and looked like Eskimos. We sweated rivers—and froze later over Udine. The ride was painful, for we were cramped in amongst the containers of our supplies, and the roar of the engines was overwhelming—also, naturally, the prospect of a parachute jump into enemy territory at night, or any other time, is none too comforting.

I realize this sounds like a story, but it's about the way it happened (leaving out the gaudier details); and I know you've been wondering why you haven't heard from me for the last 3 months. Naturally we couldn't tell anyone what was up.

Before embarking at Brindisi we did not know just where we'd drop. A couple of places I'd been counting on were ruled out in the last 2 days because of Nazi troop movements. We climbed up thru the small hole in the bottom of the plane and found we were bound for Mt. Pala in the foothills of the Alps of Carnia; bad news for me, as it was some 85 miles from the Cortina area. Smitty and I squabbled for the privilege of being first out on the jump, but he outranked me.

We nearly did not make it, as the pilot could not find the right pattern of ground fires in the right place. Jerry was, aside from shooting at us with flak, apparently lighting a few signals to decoy us. Finally, the word came back over the intercom that the right fires

had been spotted, but in the wrong place. One of the crew opened the hatch, and after a dying run by the plane, Smitty, Vic, and Stan disappeared thru the hole—just like that. Joe Lukitsch and I swung our legs into the hole and looked down. With a full moon the tumbled hills far below looked eerie; the fires looked small and distant. They were, about 2,500 feet. Suddenly the green light blazed and the bell rang on the wall of the ship, and I dropped thru, Joe right after me. The 'chute opened with a crack, but I had a bad spin and the shroud lines were twisting rapidly—if they twist enough, the 'chute collapses. I fought for about 1,000 feet before the twists came out. . . .

Below, there was nothing but hill, woods, and rocks. It looked like a trap. I was sure it was when I landed—between two wicked spikes of limestone, doing a couple of back somersaults down a gully into some saplings. There wasn't a person around, just complete silence. I cut my way out of the 'chute and got out my automatic. For 20 minutes there wasn't a sound. Then I made for a low, bare hillock nearby and in a little while the others came up. It was 2 a.m. The fires were phoney all right—Smitty had landed near them and seen a man running away.

About 700 yards away a fire shone on the side of Mt. Pala, but we couldn't find the path; which was lucky as the fire came from a house the Germans were burning, we found out later. They were too drunk to pay any attention to the drop.

We hid in a deep swale until dawn, and then I went to a farmhouse to ask questions. By noon we had made contact with some local Partisans and later were on our way back into the mountains. We felt that we had been granted a miracle. The whole operation was in full sight of Nazi observation towers in the plain below; and the lack of reception and the hideous rock pile we landed on should have made us all casualties and easy prisoners. Aside from cuts and bruises we were O.K. It took the Nazis a week to start chasing us.

On August 12th I started out alone for the Cadore, about 30 miles from Ovasta, crossing Lavardet Pass; made contact with the Partisans around San Stefano, and started work. The Cadore was tough, because there were Nazi garrisons in all the towns, and the area was much more populated and desirable to Jerry than desolate Carnia. Cortina alone had 1,000 picked troops to guard the 5,000 wounded Nazis in the hotels and hospitals there.

The Air Corps would not drop to me in Cadore—mountains too high—altho I spent 18 days at a dropping zone on the Austrian border (the Val Visdende), watching the German Army build its "Alpine Line". Whatever you've heard about that in the papers is direct intelligence I gathered. Finally we rigged a system for back-packing arms and explosives across the ranges from Carnia. I travelled back and forth and round about all over the area, always in uniform, often 500 yards from Nazi garrisons, or walking past their front doors at night, and earned a pair of legs like cast iron. So, by the end of September, I had been able to get an organization of 500 men on its feet, dispatch reams of important intelligence to GHQ, blow out the standard gauge R.R. from Venice and the electric R.R. through Cortina to Austria, and eleven highway bridges, effectively blocking all routes through the Alps north of Venice. Mr. Nazi was proportionately furious, the more so when we attacked 3 garrisons, taking around 187 prisoners.

But by the end of September there was snow on the highest peaks, and the campaign in Italy had changed to a holding action, designed to keep as many Nazi troops there as possible so they wouldn't reinforce the other fronts. Our time schedule was badly upset. We got the terrific news, too, that Jerry planned to turn over Carnia to the savages from Turkestan, who would massacre all the Italians and take the farms for themselves, thus giving future Germany an area deep into Italy populated by a solid block of pro-Nazi Mongols. Smitty worked himself green, getting in arms for the poor Italians and begging to have Tolmezzo bombed—but GHQ wouldn't bomb, for some unknown reason. All things taken together, we felt we had to stay until the front had advanced considerably, so as to help the Army as much as possible in cutting the supply lines.

In spite of the shadow that hung over Carnia, everything was going very well in the upper Piave River valley in Cadore. At the end of Sept. I heard about a large group of Italian patriots—all ex-Alpini soldiers—on the *other* side of Cortina, over near Selva-di-Cadore. They needed help. So I made up my pack and started out, contouring the peaks just at the line where the bare rock jumps from the steep scrub slopes. It took 3 days to make the 55 miles and involved 32,000 feet of climbing. But from August 12th 'til now (3 months or a little less) I'd been living and working at 7,000 feet and often going to 9,000 on reconnaissance, so it wasn't too tough. I lost some time skirting the Marmarole range and Mt. Antelao, as I had to slip

through patrols of 500 Nazi Alpenjaeger who were out hunting Partisans. And the last day was in a snowstorm and a foot of new snow over the flank of Mt. Pelmo.

This group was all I'd heard, being all ex-officers and non-coms of the Alpini troops who knew every trail and crag of all the Dolomites. Their Hq was only 4 hours by foot from Cortina, just over the range I had skied in 1937-38. I got a message back to Base requesting a drop. The plane came, 2 wks. later, in the middle of a Nazi drive on Partisans around Cortina, so we didn't get the drop, being unable to light signal fires. We climbed up in the rock of the precipices for 5 straight days and watched the Nazis hunting for us in the forests below. Each evening they fired cannon and machine guns up into the rock gullies, just in case; and we watched the tracers smack on the rock all around us. We couldn't do anything, having no guns. But they never really saw us, and finally went away.

Then I got crushing news. The 14,000 troops at Tolmezzo had overrun Carnia from the south, while 3,000 Nazis brought in from Austria attacked from the north. Smitty and the rest were caught between the 2 forces, and I haven't heard a whisper about them since—over 3 weeks. I feel sure he must have got through and escaped toward Yugoslavia, that being one of our exit plans before we started. [They had.]

But for 3 weeks now I've been the only Allied officer in the whole Alps—and without a radio. Just waiting for some break and trying to keep up the Partisan's courage. Not that the time has been wasted. I managed to get contact with certain people in Bolzano and perfected a plan for blowing out one of the tunnels on the R.R. through the Brenner; sent the explosive off to them disguised as crates of *jam* last week! Then, too, I managed to sign up a couple of electrical engineers and we worked out a scheme for crippling the entire telephone and telegraph net in the Alps here—important, because of the Alpine Line fortifications Jerry is working so feverishly on. And of course there's been a wad of intelligence coming in; for example, by a stroke of pure luck, I got the map of the Nazi troop dispositions as planned for the defense of the Brenner—stuff like that; another case, the Hq of the Japanese secret service (Hotel Corona, Cortina).

It has snowed every day for 3 weeks, and is still at it, so movement is out of the question, as Jerry can track you too easily in the snow. However, recently I made contact with an officer (Captain Joe

"Steve" Hall

~~OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~

Benucci) down in the Venetian plain below Belluno; so things are looking up. He has a radio.

At present I'm in the tiny hamlet of Andrich, part of the community of Vallada, 3 miles west of Ceucenighe, whiling away the hours reading "Ivanhoe" and some 1939 copies of "Colliers" someone dug up! The fine Italian family here with whom I'm staying will mail this after the war.

The position is really good, as it's plunk in the middle of the Alpine Line the Nazis are building. They're laboring over some beautiful targets for us to blow up when and if we get a drop. But you don't need to worry; we're getting to be old hands at the art of running in under the Nazi's nose and blowing the shoestrings out of his boots before he knows what's happened. If he ever catches up with me, all he'll find is another Yank who parachuted from a crashing plane—of which there are many hiding away in the Alps—and waiting for the end of the war.

How I'll get out, I don't know, although I wish I could give you some assurance. The possibility of crossing the Swiss frontier is out of the picture now because of the snow (it came a whole month early this year). Carnia is solid Nazi, now, so a dash to Yugoslavia—150 miles—is none too good. So it looks like north or south. North—to fall back with the Nazis when they retreat from Italy and take up this line; south—to try to filter through and meet the Allies when they advance. Either possibility isn't bad. But the best one is, of course, the end of the war before the Nazis move back here in force. That's what I'm hoping for.

No matter what, it may be some time after the armistice before I get out to wire you—having to hide and linger around awhile before showing myself. So that's why I'm writing this—the family here will mail it with the armistice.

The mission (called Mercury Eagle) has already paid for itself and been a success. We got a lot more accomplished than anyone thought possible; luck has been with us all the way, it looks like. If Smitty is O.K. everything is all right; and I have high hopes for the future. Luck has really played a big part, with countless hair-breadth escapes from Mr. Hitler's animals, and universal success in whatever we undertook. It's only regretted that we did not get even more support from Rome, for opportunities were boundless in August and September.

~~OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~

It would be a lie for me to say this has been an adventure or good time for me. True, at times there have been light moments, a few; and at other times the work has been long and exhausting. I've seen more gorgeous scenery than three men will in a lifetime—sunrises and sunsets among the peaks, moonlight glimmering on glaciers, storms swirling around tremendous pillars of rock, cataracts, forest glades, ancient villages. But full enjoyment is not truly there when you are on eternal guard against guns appearing behind every rock and shadow. The "threat" never leaves you, asleep or awake; and I have not lain down yet to sleep without a cocked pistol at my right hand. In a land where you regularly have to hike and climb 11 miles to reach a point only 3 miles away by road, there's usually more to occupy the mind than breathless vistas of beauty. . . .

It has not been sport, but rather a deadly business—an unending struggle to plan each tiny detail for days ahead, when you really don't know what's going to happen in the next 15 minutes. If you make the slightest error, someone dies; I found that out quickly. It seems as tho life and death has been in my hands since this started, for as the only representative of law and order wherever I've gone, I have had to sit as judge at trials of criminals and spies; to determine the fate of prisoners taken; to issue orders for the general good that yet meant violence to someone along the line before they were consummated. It was the one feature of this job I did not foresee, and would have avoided with all my heart. I have saved many, many lives that would otherwise have been lost—Nazi prisoners, circumstantial cases, petty cases—for the law of the partisans before I arrived was death for anything or anyone shady. . . .

Militarily, I've thought of it as a game of chess, with the whole Alps as a board, whereon you try to outguess the enemy and move always into a square where he won't come. The feeling of being hunted is something that can never leave you; it's very tiring, and requires fierce self-control when you have so much else that requires the best sense and judgment you can exert. This village of Andrich happens to be a square where Mr. Nazi won't think of looking for a while.

If there has been any recompense for us, it has come, not from the scenery, but from the reactions of the people—persecuted, starved, and enslaved by the Nazis. We've been able to bring them medicines, a few of the comforts of life (cigarettes, coffee, sugar), a little money, but mostly hope. There's nothing anyone will ever be able to say or show that will make me think there's anything good about a German.

The atrocities are true; I've seen them; and they're universal. Villages burned, children hung, men tortured, old people turned out in the snow, civilians shot for sport—I've seen those things with my own eyes. These hideous acts yield a crop of man whose fury knows no bounds—they make up the Partisan bands I've helped organize; they're the sword of God, if there ever has been one in history.

If any of you ever travel to these parts in the future, don't be afraid to mention my name. It's known from one end of the Alps to the other (a fame far out of proportion to what I've been able to do). You'll receive hospitality undreamed of, assuming you are in the little inns and with the real inhabitants.

This job hasn't been world-shaking and may never be recorded even in Army records. But I've told about it so that you will know, even if it hasn't been as much as many, many others have done in this war, at least I've done something.

Love to all,

Steve

* * *

[Statement of Andrich, Giovanni:]

. . . During the month of August . . . I knew of Hall's presence in the Partisan formation Calvi, with which I collaborated in the way of information and map material. During the second half of September 1944 Hall moved to the Partisan formation Val Cordevole in the Civetta group commanded by Ettore and Simone. During the first few days in Oct. 44 the said formation was subjected to a three day mopping-up operation by the nazifascists; all of the formation escaped. The same Partisan formations were disbanded by order of the Partisan Provincial Command with approaching of winter. From then on Hall was a guest at my mother's house. We became good friends; I became his informer.

On 7 Nov. at Belluno they arrested Montagne and Giacomo, members of CLN. Montagne talked after being tortured and admitted the complicity of Giacomo. Giacomo was himself tortured and tried to kill himself by cutting his veins, during the night from 8 to 9 Nov. On 11 Nov. the Partisan Provincial Command advised Simone to disappear and the undersigned to do likewise. On 12 Nov. a German police captain was making an investigation of my activities. I kept Capt. Hall informed of the above.

On 13 Nov. we had a long conversation and examined the situation. First, to try to reach the Appennines and cross the front lines in order to reach the south: this possibility was dismissed in consideration of the fact that Capt. Hall could not speak Italian and the enterprise was very risky. Second, to try together to reach Switzerland through the frontier of Lombardy. This solution was not possible either, because Hall could not speak Italian and because he would have certainly been identified during the proposed journey through Lombardy. It was decided that Hall be kept in a farmhouse very distant from the town with a safe family. Hall proposed that I reach his southern command through Switzerland and place myself at the disposal of them in consideration of my perfect knowledge of the high Belluno and Adige areas insofar as electrical installations, fortifications, and roads were concerned. I accepted the said proposal.

On 14 Nov. I took leave from Hall and the morning of the 15th I left for Lombardy and I left for Switzerland on 8 Dec. Hall had hinted that he wanted to reach his group in Carnia. During my residence in Milano from 20 Nov. to 7 Dec. I received a letter from my wife which stated that on 17 or 18 Nov. Hall visited with my mother and said that he was leaving; he left the area without saying goodbye to anyone but my family.

About the first half of Nov. Hall [had written] me a long letter asking me to deliver it to his dear ones through his command so soon as my area was liberated. The said letter was placed in a bottle and sealed in his presence and buried in the vicinity of my mother's house. No one knew of Hall's presence in my mother's house but Giacomo, Ettore, Simone, and my own family. These persons certainly did not talk.

I believe that Capt. Hall, in view of the heavy snowfall which occurred during the night from 14 to 15 Nov. (twenty cm.), decided to leave alone and without guide for Carnia in order not to remain blocked throughout the winter in the said locality.

Florence, 6 May 1945.

Q. What do you think of Giacomo?

A. Giacomo, Ettore and Simone are very good men.

Q. What of Tell?

A. I know him only by sight; he worked with Hall; blew up bridges; participated in several operations. I did not hear badly of him as a partisan, heard badly of him as a man . . .

* * *

"Steve" Hall

~~OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~

[Messages received at Company D Hq:]

From Hall via Aztec, 10 Dec:

Tell captured. Torture threat made him Nazi agent. Has told all and turned in 20 of my men. Believed in Candide area helping Nazi patrols. Will try to find you next. Kill on sight. Hall.

Aztec 15 Feb. 1945, No. 60:

Hall captured by Nazis. Held in Verona.

Aztec 4 March 1945, No. 72:

Hall captured on way to sabotage Cortina-Doffisco rr line. Heavy snow forced him to rest at house when owner informed Nazis of his presence.

* * *

[German log:]

Cortina, 29 Jan. 1945

Subject: Weekly report, 22-29 Jan. 1945.

To: Commander of Security Police and SD Branch, Cortina.

I. Outstanding events:

None.

. . . .

III. Sentences:

. . . .

For partisan activities: Roderick Hall American Air Force Lt.
27 Jan. 45.

Signed:

Meier

Commander, Gendarmerie.

* * *

Statement of Captain Howard W. Chappell:

. . . I was head of the Tacoma Mission, in the Belluno area of Northern Italy from 27 December 1944 to 20 May 1945. . . . At no time did I become personally acquainted with Captain Hall but as a brother officer in the field, I have done my best to reconstruct his movements and actions. . . .

~~OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~

At 0700 hours on the morning of 26 January 1945, Captain Hall prepared an explosive charge and prepared to depart for Cortina d'Ampezzo. At 0800 hours, he left the camp near Selva, saying to S/Sgt. Eugene Orban, "This is the opportunity I have been waiting for, with this heavy snow I will have cover to get into Cortina to blow up the railroad transformer station." He was advised against going at that time because an extremely heavy snow had been falling all night and was still falling with no sign of abating. He was determined, however, to accomplish the job and left on skis at 0800 hours. His feet at this time were still causing him considerable difficulty as they had never fully recovered from being frozen some time previously.

[Follows an account of Hall's capture, torture in Cortina, and subsequent treatment in Bolzano inconsistent with first-hand evidence below.]

Subscribed and sworn to . . . this
28th day of May, 1945, in Siena, Italy.

* * *

16 May 1945.

Memorandum

Subject: Circumstances surrounding capture of Captain Roderick
S. G. Hall.

During the interrogation of Forest Guard Alberti, Michele, the following facts were obtained regarding the actual taking of Captain Hall, and are believed by me to be the true ones in the case:

About the middle of January 1945, Alberti during his regular round in connection with his duties as Forest Guard, at a spot about 500 meters from the village of Campo di Sopra, about 2½ km. south of Cortina, came across an individual later established to be Captain Hall. Captain Hall, when Alberti first saw him, was sitting in a depression in the ground on the lee side of a stack of cordwood; near him were his skis, and his submachine-gun was within easy arm's reach. Captain Hall had one boot off and was rubbing his bare foot with snow.

Alberti states that Captain Hall was wearing some kind of uniform, evidently a flying suit judging from his description, and some kind of insignia which Alberti was unable to recall. Alberti stated that his first reaction was one of "compassion" for a man evidently in trouble and offered to aid Captain Hall, without realizing that he might be an Allied officer. Captain Hall, though he spoke very little Italian, accepted Alberti's offer to accompany him to the nearby village of Campo, offered no resistance to Alberti, allowed Alberti to pick up and carry the SMG, and on skis followed behind Alberti to Campo.

Alberti's reiterated statement that Captain Hall several times during the walk to the village said "Sono stufo di questa vita (I am fed up with this life)" is of interest . . . Alberti, who is an old man and made his rounds unarmed, could have offered no effective resistance to a young and determined man. Upon arrival at the village of Campo, Alberti had Captain Hall enter one of the local houses to warm himself in the kitchen and had hot milk served to him.

Consulting with the villagers, Alberti, who was beginning to suspect that he had captured an Allied officer, decided to telephone the Feldgendarmerie of Cortina in the matter. Approximately an hour later two police (German) from this office arrived in Campo and accompanied Hall to Cortina. With evident sincerity Alberti repeatedly made the statement that Hall gave no indication of desiring to escape and comported himself with the greatest calm; he also reported that several times during his wait Hall again made the statement "Sono stufo di questa vita."

After Hall was taken to Cortina, Alberti had no further connection with the case, and other than knowing by rumor that he was subsequently turned over to Dr. Lospichel [head of the SS in Cortina] and later sent to Bolzano, had no idea of the ultimate fate of Captain Hall. The day following the evening that Hall was sent to Cortina from Campo, however, the two German police returned to the latter village, commended Alberti for his vigilance, and as a reward allowed him to keep Hall's skis.

The local Partisan "Command" members of Cortina stated to me that Dr. Lospichel was generally considered an unusually kind and just person, and that no hint of cruelty or harshness had ever attached to

his name. I interrogated Michielli, Angelo . . . , who was acting as major-domo of Dr. Lospichel's villa at Cortina during the time Hall was there. His statements, also apparently completely sincere, were as follows:

Between 20 and 30 January Michielli received orders one night to prepare an extra bed in one of the bedrooms of Lospichel's villa, without being given any details, however, as to the identity of its intended occupant. Reporting for work the following morning about 0800 he met the man later established in his mind to be Captain Hall, an American "parachutist" officer.

As Michielli recalls, Captain Hall remained in the villa for two nights, departing for Bolzano on the morning of the third day. Michielli was extremely emphatic in his statements that Hall was at all times extremely cheerful, courageous, and in apparently good physical condition. Michielli was also most certain that Captain Hall did not walk with a limp, did not complain of sore feet, or otherwise give indication of having suffered from frostbite.

Michielli stated that Captain Hall was treated with the utmost kindness and consideration, that he ate at Dr. Lospichel's table and carried on an animated and cheerful conversation during these occasions. On one of the nights of Hall's stay a rather elaborate and festive dinner was served during which the wine flowed rather freely and was the occasion of marked conviviality on the part of all concerned, though Michielli was firm in maintaining that Hall gave no indication of having overimbibed.

On one of the mornings of Hall's stay at Lospichel's villa, Michielli took a typewriter to his room, and stated that Hall was busy the whole of the morning composing a lengthy report. . . . He overheard Hall say to Lospichel . . . that he had nothing further to add to what he had written. Michielli states that there was no evidence of coercion in connection with Hall's preparation of the typewritten report, and that during the time of its composition Hall was apparently in his usual good spirits.

Michielli repeatedly stated to me that Hall was extremely frank in speaking of his clandestine activities prior to falling into German hands, even giving a few details of his activities to Michielli. . . . Michielli states that on the morning of his departure for Bolzano . . . , Hall shook hands with Lospichel in the manner of one taking leave of a good friend, and jokingly told

Lospichel that they should meet at Cortina for the skiing season at war's end. Michielli was emphatic in his statement that Captain Hall took his leave of Lospichel in a most cheerful, almost gay manner, and showed not the slightest sign of worry as to what might lie ahead of him.

Following questioning of Michielli I interrogated Mutschlechner, Giuseppe . . ., driver for Lospichel and chauffeur of the automobile in which Captain Hall was taken to Bolzano. His statements were as follows:

Hall was extremely well treated during his stay of four or five days at Cortina and was in excellent health and spirits at all times, and gave no signs of fear or worry. Mutschlechner on several occasions observed Hall at table with Dr. Lospichel, engaged in animated and cheerful conversation.

Prior to the war Mutschlechner had served as chauffeur at the Hotel Argentina at Cortina, and Hall had spent 4 months at this hotel about 1937, according to Mutschlechner's recollection. Hall recognized Mutschlechner and warmly asked after other former hotel employees whom he had known there. Mutschlechner stated that Hall was most cordial and friendly at all times, and was very frank in stating that he had arrived by parachute on an Allied mission, that he had engaged in clandestine activities, and that, in Mutschlechner's words, he had been a "Partisan Chief" prior to his capture.

Mutschlechner corroborated Michielli's statement that Hall prepared a "long" typewritten report . . . [and] that the report in question was prepared without any evidence of reluctance on the part of Captain Hall.

Mutschlechner's description of Captain Hall's leave-taking of Dr. Lospichel was identical to that given by Michielli, reported above. . . .

Mutschlechner repeatedly stated that Captain Hall was very gay during the trip to Bolzano, laughing and joking with [his German escorts], several times saying that all the vehicle's occupants would meet again at Cortina during the skiing season. Mutschlechner was emphatic in his belief that there was nothing forced in Hall's gaiety and that it was not a cover for nervousness or fear.

~~OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~

"Steve" Hall

It is Mutschlechner's theory that Hall gave himself up because he was "stufo" with carrying on such a difficult and hunted life, and he points out, as reported above, that Forest Guard Alberti could not have taken Hall had the latter wished actively to resist capture.

Like Michielli, Mutschlechner had no idea of Hall's ultimate fate.

Roger H. Hollingshead
Captain AUS

* * *

21 June 1945

TO: Colonel Tom H. Barratt
Executive Officer
Judge Advocate Section, MTO

SUBJECT: Hall, Capt. Roderick S., Case No. 101

On 15 February 1945 a message was received by the Company D base from the mission with whom Hall had established courier service to the effect that Hall was captured, . . . that the Germans were threatening to shoot him, but that they were willing to effect an exchange for a Nazi officer. Consequently arrangements for an exchange were undertaken through Switzerland, and our Swiss connections established contact with the Gestapo and reported on 19 February that they had started negotiations for the exchange. The Germans were to give an answer in 3 days if they would accept the proposition for exchange.

On 28 February the Germans sent a message to us through our contact that they were agreeable to an exchange through Switzerland. On 9 March our contact stated that he had met with the Germans who were interested in making the exchange² and would submit names from their side within the week. . . . Later, on 19 March, our Swiss source stated that the Gestapo reported that they had no details on Capt. Hall and wished more information. This . . . was obviously false as Hall had been captured since probable date 23 January, and

² This meeting was the first between SS General Karl Wolff and Allen Dulles in the "Sunrise" negotiations. On 8 March Wolff had delivered Partisan leaders Ferruccio Parri and Antonio Usmiani as an earnest of good faith.

"Steve" Hall

~~OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~

this message would indicate that even then the Germans were seeking to hide what had actually happened to Capt. Hall. . . .

Judson B. Smith
Major, AGD
War Crimes Investigation
Section

* * *

Bozen (Bolzano),
12 May 1945

[Information from] Col. H. M. Threlfall, Liaison Commission, 15th
American Field Army:

Subject: List of captured English and American officers.

Captain Roderick S. Hall, 01114150. During investigations so far conducted, it has developed that an individual named Hall, without citizenship and under observation-arrest by the Security Police in Bozen, has committed suicide during an air raid. The cause of death has been determined by physician, and death certificate was issued by the Office of the Registrar in Bolzano where the burial place could also be established. At present, proceedings are being carried on to find the doctor and the certificate. . . .

* * *

29 May 1945

Informal Report on the Investigation of the Fate of Capt. Roderick Hall Conducted by Capt. Albert R. Materazzi on 13 May 1945 in Bolzano:

I first went to CLN headquarters where I obtained the services of a partisan intelligence officer from Bolzano to assist me. . . . We checked various Italian civil agencies and finally located the bureau of vital statistics. There we discovered the death records of "Roderick Hall." We dug out the file and found the death certificate and interment order. The former was signed by a Dr. Pittschlieler and the latter by Lt. Tito of the SS who had been camp commandant of the Gries concentration camp (near Bolzano). . . . Tec/5 Fabrega, who was with me, was detailed to find the doctor and we went to the cemetery

~~OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~

65

~~OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~

"Steve" Hall

where we located the grave. . . . The grave was marked by a small headstone bearing the number 17. It was in row E. The cemetery records were checked and they showed that a "Roderick Hall" was buried there. . . .

* * *

Bolzano 15-5-1945

My name is Fabrega, Salvador, A.S.N. 32993553 Spec. Rec. Bat., 2677th Regt. O.S.S.

I was prisoner in the concentration Camp here in Bolzano and in the time I was detained know very well the Dr. Pittschieler, Carl, which himself was a political prisoner till the Germans put him to work for them in the camp as a Doctor. He was always been very kind to me and the rest of the boys and try to help us the best he could. I am very reconnaissant of his services and the best I can ask to the Americans they will have contact with him is to recommend him so that can help us and find out plenty things we must put in the light and for boys that in the time were kill in the camp and he knows a little, while the Germans did not let him know to much.

Thanks many times and good luck to you.

Lt/Sgt Salvador Fabrega

With the Capt. Masseratti we have interogat this man and told him that soon will have to make more depositions when the G.I. will be in town.

P.D. I am American but born in Spain. I only been in the U.S.A. since June 1940. The reason I said that is because mebe you will see I made few mistake in the writing. I did'n learn Ingles in the school so you will not mind. Sal

* * *

1 June 1945

[Deposition of Dr.] Karl Pittschieler, [native of] Bolzano:

At about 1830 hours on the evening of 20 February 1945, just as I was stepping out of my office at the Camp . . . , I saw a large black six-passenger limousine stop before the cell-block, and saw the following persons alight from it: SS Untersturmfuehrer Andergassen; SS Oberscharfuehrer Storz; and SS Hauptscharfuehrer Johann

Haage. . . . Haage roughly called me to . . . follow him into the entrance hall of the cell-block, where, behind the door, I observed a rough wooden coffin. In the meantime Andergassen and Storz had opened the rear door of the limousine and from the tonneau removed a corpse wrapped in a blanket, and proceeded to carry it . . . into the entrance hall.

Here Andergassen and Storz roughly threw the corpse into the coffin . . . ; owing to its advanced stage of rigor mortis the body was awkward and difficult to manage, and Haage forced it into the coffin with his feet, after having removed . . . the blanket. [He then] ordered me, . . . "See whether he's dead or not." I was permitted only the most cursory observation of the corpse, and further, owing to the dim light in the cell-block entrance hall, detailed examination was out of the question. . . . However, I . . . came to the conclusion that death had taken place approximately six hours previously. . . . I saw no blood on the body, no marks of strangulation, nor other evidence on which definitely to arrive at determination of cause of death. . . .

On the following day Haage . . . ordered me to prepare a death certificate for the corpse examined the previous evening, telling me [it] was to be made out in the name of Roderick Hall. . . . Knowing that my refusal to prepare the requested death certificate would lead to the corpse's clandestine burial in an unidentified grave, . . . I prepared the certificate, showing "paralisi cardiaca" (cardiac paralysis) as cause of death.

* * *

3 June 1945

[Deposition of] Miss Longo, Renata, [native of] Bolzano. . . . :

On 22 May 1944 I was called for obligatory work service and assigned to the "packages and censorship" office of the Bolzano Concentration Camp, where I clandestinely did all in my power to help the inmates, acting as message carrier to and from the outside for them, bringing them small packages, etc.

While at the camp I learned from records available to me that a certain Roderick Hall was being held there in solitary confinement. While I no longer recall the period that he was held there, I know that Roderick Hall's incarceration at the Concentration Camp was of short duration.

A very short time later, date not remembered, I heard of the death of Roderick Hall and, as a matter of personal interest, queried Maresciallo Hans Haage, in charge of prisoners, in this regard. Haage's only answer was a leering smile which led me to believe Roderick Hall's death was not a natural one, and made me feel certain that Haage knew all the facts in the case. . . .

* * *

3 June 1945

[Deposition of] Arthur Schoster, . . . [formerly] Commissioner of Criminal Police . . . for the Province of Bolzano:

. . . I did not belong to the SS and was not a member of the Nazi Party. . . . My activities as Commissioner of Criminal Police had no relation to military police, military security, secret service, or other specialized spheres, but were purely in the field of civilian criminology.

I have no first-hand knowledge with regard to the case of Captain Roderick Hall; . . . [but on some of] the personalities . . . who are of interest with regard to the case . . . , the following notes are submitted.

. . .

Rudolph Thyrolf, SS-Sturmbannfuehrer.

Thyrolf was chief of the Sicherheitspolizei and SD Command in Bolzano . . . Thyrolf, who is of North German origin, gave the impression of being a mild and pleasant sort of person, and his private life was apparently above reproach. He is known to have treated the personnel of his office with consideration, but . . . from an official point of view he was interested only in the secret service and in specialized police activities. He is known to have given direct orders for the beating and torturing of prisoners.

Thyrolf . . . held his position on orders of Gauleiter Hofer, but the appointment was vigorously opposed by General Harster, who definitely favored Schiffer (see below) and placed the latter in Thyrolf's office, perhaps to spy on him, and eventually to replace him. It is possible, therefore, that Thyrolf, because of the difficult position in which he thus found himself, was led by Schiffer into greater brutalities and excesses than he otherwise would have committed.

. . .

On 2 May 1945, Thyrolf left Bolzano by automobile, possibly accompanied by SS-Oberscharfuehrer Albert Storz (see below).

August Schiffer, SS-Sturmbannfuehrer.

Schiffer was Chief of Section IV (Gestapo) under the Sicherheitspolizei and SD Command of Bolzano, . . . and at the same time acted as Thyrolf's deputy. . . . In October 1944 he arrived from Trieste . . . and it is from that date that the period of greatest brutalities and excesses in the Bolzano Gestapo took place. Schiffer was an extreme Party fanatic and was one of the select authorized to wear the *gold* Nazi Party emblem. He was the incarnation of brutality, was hated and feared by even his own colleagues and personnel, and threatened to eliminate those among them who failed to conform to his own standards of brutality and mercilessness. . . . He was utterly corrupt, carrying out arrests and illegal requisitioning for sole purposes of furthering his personal interests. In one particular instance he is known to have arrested a woman of Bolzano for the purpose of obtaining her fur coat which had happened to strike the fancy of his secretary, who also doubled as his mistress.

This secretary, Miss Christina Roy, also known as "Krista," . . . is presently residing at the Hotel Watschinger in Sesto (Val Pusteria) and could probably give useful information in connection with the Hall case.

Schiffer was among the first to flee Bolzano, leaving on 30 April 1945, by automobile in the company of SS-Untersturmfuehrer Heinz Andergassen (see below) . . .

Albert Storz, SS-Oberscharfuehrer.

Storz was attached to [Schiffer's] Section IV (Gestapo), . . . and his duties were chiefly in connection with Gestapo prisoners. Storz was an extremely brutal, sadistic type of person and carried out, often personally, beatings and torture of prisoners ordered by Thyrolf and Schiffer. Storz probably left Bolzano on 2 May 1945, in the company of Thyrolf . . .

Heinz Andergassen, SS-Untersturmfuehrer.

Andergassen was also attached to Abteilung IV (Gestapo), . . . and his duties were roughly the same as those of Storz. Andergassen, known as Schiffer's right-hand man, was the incarnation of sadism and brutality; he was incredibly blood-thirsty, especially when under

the influence of strong drink, for which he had a great fondness, and was encouraged in all his excesses by Schiffer.

As previously mentioned, Andergassen left Bolzano with Schiffer on 30 April 1945 . . .

Karl Tito, SS-Untersturmfuehrer.

Tito was Commandant of the Bolzano Concentration Camp . . . His responsibilities to Thyrolf and Schiffer were only in connection with Gestapo prisoners who might be in the Camp.

Tito is not well known to me, but it is not believed that he was an especially brutal type, rather a weak character who merely carried out the orders of his superiors. He probably tried to follow the line of least resistance and lead as easy a life as possible, and most likely was not directly responsible for the atrocities of the camp; certainly, however, he was au courant of all that went on there.

It is known that Tito was still in Bolzano after the arrival of the Allies . . .

Johann Haage, SS-Hauptscharfuehrer.

Haage was attached to the Concentration Camp, nominally under the orders of Camp Commandant Tito, but because of the latter's weak character by far the more important person in any consideration of Concentration Camp activities. Haage's reputation is one of extreme brutality and cruelty.

It is reported that Haage left Bolzano sometime in May 1945, going first to the Val Pusteria area . . .

* * *

Bolzano, 12 June 1945

[Deposition of] Christa Roy:

. . . In Trieste I . . . was assigned to Abteilung 4 (Gestapo). At the same time Kriminaldirektor and SS Sturmbannfuehrer August Schiffer was also transferred to Trieste and I was assigned to him and became his secretary. When Schiffer in October 1944 was transferred to Bolzano, he took the necessary steps through the RSHA personnel officer, who was his friend, to have me also transferred to Bolzano with him. . . .

During the course of the interrogations I took in shorthand all that had to be put in typewritten reports. Consequently I know all about this particular case. . . .

Captain Hall was transported by car from Cortina to Bolzano. . . . He was immediately brought to the Villa Polacco where he had supper in the kitchen. Hall must then have been interrogated by Thyrolf, who speaks fairly good English, as far as I can judge, and in the presence of Schiffer. This was a provisional informational interrogation. I was not present at this interrogation. I suppose that in the same evening Captain Hall was taken to the mess hall of the Viktoria Gasthaus because there was a room there reserved for prisoners of honor.

The next morning Hall was conducted into Schiffer's office to continue the interrogations. I was present. The interrogation was conducted by . . . Thyrolf. Captain Hall stressed that he was an American soldier and therefore he could not be forced to make any specific declarations; when he was told that he was an enemy agent and not a soldier, he answered that because he was wearing the uniform he had to be treated like a soldier. Schiffer through Thyrolf told him that he could not be recognized as a soldier because he had been infiltrated behind the lines and therefore was obliged to furnish all information. Nevertheless Hall refused; but when Thyrolf told him that what he said would never be known to the American authorities, he changed his attitude.

I have the impression that Captain Hall was, as we say in Germany, of a soft nature. When he was again assured by Schiffer and Thyrolf that his verbal and written declarations would never be made known to any American agencies, . . . and when it was also made clear that unless he gave all necessary information as well as the details of what his mission was and what he had done up to the date of his arrest, he would not be sent to an officers' PW camp, he made his confession. He stated that he was an American Captain and that he was in the service of OSS.

He said that OSS was an American secret military organization, whose members were only volunteers and that only first-rate soldiers were used and they were sworn to complete secrecy, even among themselves. He explained that OSS members had to undergo special school training, and he mentioned several towns in southern Italy where this training was given. He declared that when he was sent into the Cortina region, his duties were to find out everything concerning the German war machine, to contact resistance movements, and to weaken the Germans through terror and acts of sabotage. He told the names of the leaders of some of the Italian bandit groups

with whom he was in contact. He also said that he helped in the demolition of several bridges and other objectives.

Speaking about himself, Hall said that he was from a good family, that his father or uncle, I do not remember which, was to be a member of the future peace delegation, and that one of his relatives was in the British government; he was a prominent personality. Hall gave these details on himself so that he could be exchanged for two or three important German officers. Always referring to this, he also offered an enormous sum of American dollars.

Thyrolf then started negotiation on this deal and assured Hall that he would be treated as an officer to be exchanged, but under the condition that he would first give a complete written report on all his background and training, his duties and accomplishments in the north Italian area. He was then given the chance immediately to write this report and put down whatever he had already told orally. He wrote part of this report in my office. I know that he used to bring continuously reports written in pencil.

. . . .

The meaning of "intensified" interrogation was unknown to me [until] . . . I was transferred to Trieste and Schiffer became the Chief of Abteilung 4 (Gestapo) . . . Schiffer had been in action in the East, and . . . he must have learned all the different ways of torture applied in intensified interrogation while in Russia. . . . In Trieste the tortures were introduced by him, ordered by him, and many times carried out by him personally. . . . When he was transferred to Bolzano he continued to use the intensified interrogation, and for those which were to be conducted by him he ordered me to be present and take notes in shorthand.

When at the beginning I refused to be present at this type of interrogation, Schiffer laughed in my face and said that a German woman had to be hard where enemies were concerned. So I obeyed him and became accustomed to these maltreatments. . . . These interrogations were conducted by Schiffer personally, and as collaborators in these tortures he had Andergassen and Storz.

. . . .

It appeared to me that Hall had more confidence in Thyrolf than in Schiffer, in fact in spite of his manners, Hall could not get along with Schiffer because he could not overcome his hostile attitude. As far as I know, Captain Hall was never forced to an intensified interroga-

tion because I think that Thyrolf especially would have never permitted this since he had the intention of treating Hall as an exchange prisoner. Schiffer on the contrary took a more radical attitude and would have been inclined to subject Hall to an intensified interrogation. I cannot state whether Schiffer did subject Hall to such interrogation without the knowledge of Thyrolf.

On 16 February 1945 Bolzano was bombed. At that time Captain Hall was interned in one of the cells of the Corpo d'Armata. I do not know why Hall was transferred from his prison in the Viktoria Gasthaus to this cell, but I could understand that this new internment would have been harder for Hall. I do not know whether the transfer was ordered by Thyrolf or by Schiffer; it is possible that Schiffer had ordered it and Thyrolf approved.

Either on 16 February 1945 or the next morning, Gestapo interpreter and warden SS Unterscharfuehrer Johann Pinggera, who was in charge of the prisoners in the cells, came to me bringing a note written by Captain Hall. Hall had told him to forward the note to the Commander. Hall wanted the note to be given to Thyrolf only, and not to anybody else. The note was delivered to Thyrolf, and in later discussions between Thyrolf and Schiffer I heard that in it Captain Hall had asked to be put in radio contact with the Allied command so that he could obtain the immediate stopping of the bombings of the city of Bolzano. Pinggera reported also that Hall was very depressed and that he was shaking throughout his body. SS Sturmbannfuehrer Thyrolf never took any action on the note and never answered nor tried to start any negotiations.

The morning after or two days after he brought the note, Pinggera came into the office and reported he had found Captain Hall hanging in the cell either by the door handle or by the back of a chair that was in the cell. Pinggera said he was sure Hall had pulled out of his mattress the rope with which he had committed suicide. . . . The only [other] thing I know is that Captain Hall's body was sent to the Concentration Camp so that the formalities could be carried out.

* * *

[Comment by interrogator Arthur Schoster:]

Bozen, 21 June 1945

Worth pointing out is the fact that Hall was subject to continually worsening treatment. First in the Villa Polacco he was treated like

a guest and waited on, in the hall of the Viktoria Gasthaus he was a prisoner on parole, but later he was subject to the worst form of internment, being thrown into a completely filthy, unhygienic single cell in an office building in Corpo d'Armata. This would not have happened under any circumstances had they had the intention to consider him as an exchange prisoner.

. . .

The depression of Hall is easily understandable when one considers that he was kept prisoner in a cell lacking the most primitive requirements and was probably even mistreated. That Hall was trembling all over his body may also be explained by the fact that he was locked up in a completely unheated cell that contained a straw sack but probably not even a blanket.

. . .

Pinggera is supposed to have found Captain Hall hung in his cell either on the door knob or on the back of a chair on 20 February 1945 early in the morning . . . I find it imperative to conduct an inspection of the cells in the Corpo d'Armata building in the presence of the cell warden Pinggera, because to my knowledge there are no knobs on the cell doors and also there has never been a chair in the cells.

. . .

Because of the way Roy behaved in Bolzano, she was strongly criticized by the other employees. She was generally known as the "Queen." She was the one that decided if one or another employee could or could not be admitted to Schiffer's office, either in line of duty or for personal matters. Her manner toward the employees . . . even those of superior grade, was so arrogant that they . . . tried to avoid her as much as possible. The lower employees were afraid of Christa Roy . . . because they knew that one single word said by her to her superior and lover August Schiffer would have been enough to get them transferred or some other punishment. . . . I consider Christa Roy just a bitch without any feelings; she attached herself to Schiffer just . . . so that she could enjoy the advantages which came to her through her boss.

* * *

"Steve" Hall

~~OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~

Bolzano, 1 July 1945

[Deposition of] Heinz Andergassen: ³

If Capt. Hall was ever subjected to "special" interrogation I do not know . . . If he were to be interrogated the hard way, I think that my presence as well as the presence of Albert Storz and Schiffer's secretary, Miss Christa Roy, was required. . . .

I think that one or two days before Captain Hall's death Schiffer told me and Storz that he wanted to get rid of the prisoner. . . . I knew that Schiffer, having told me that he wanted to make the prisoner disappear, would have done it. . . . Schiffer . . . used to tell us how he got rid of prisoners in Trieste. Among other stories, he told us that one time . . . he went into a cell and cut a prisoner's veins at the wrist and then threw the glass on the floor so that it would have seemed that the prisoner had committed suicide. He also told us that many times he had strangled prisoners with his own hands. Of course, I do not know whether Schiffer really killed so many people by himself or had some of his men do it.

Schiffer told me, I believe the same day, that the prisoner had asked to be released to go to the Allied command where he would have been able to stop the bombings of Bolzano. If Hall really made such a proposition or had ever written a document on this, I do not know; . . . I know [only] that he was afraid of the bombings of the city . . .

I think that on 19 February 1945 Schiffer called me and Storz to his office at about noon time. I cannot remember any more if Miss Roy was in his office; anyway Schiffer and his friend Master of Gendarmerie Hans Butz were there. Schiffer gave Storz and me the order to go to the cell where Hall was and get him. Storz and I immediately went . . .; on the way Storz stopped to get a key to the cell that he had on his desk. Schiffer had taken out of a box which was locked in his desk a pair of handcuffs, which he gave to me or to Storz. Schiffer and Butz went straight to the machine-room, while

³ Details have been added in two or three places from a similar statement by Albert Storz.

~~OFFICIAL USE ONLY~~

Storz and I went to the cell to get the prisoner, and on our way to the cell we found a piece of cloth on a table and . . . took it. . . .

There were four cells all together and Hall was in the first one right in front of the entry. In the cell, Storz told Roderick Hall that he had to come along for an interrogation. (Storz spoke a few words of English.) . . . I put the handcuffs on the prisoner and I think that Storz blindfolded his eyes. The blindfolding must have been done by Storz because he is taller than I am, and Capt. Hall was a tall man.

Hall did not offer any resistance . . . Storz and I then took him down to the machine room as we were ordered. There upon Schiffer's request we moved the prisoner in front of the boiler with his back against it. . . . On one of the large valves with a wheel handle a rope was tied . . . around several times and ended with a noose. The loop had already been made and we had to pass the rope through it. This noose was put over Hall's head and left lying loose on his shoulders so that he didn't know what was happening to him. Then Butz and Storz [sprang upon him and] dragged down on his shoulders so that the noose would tighten around his neck. I tied the end of the rope again around [the next valve] because it started slipping . . . with the weight of the body. Schiffer, who was standing in front of the victim, pulled his legs off the ground and downwards so that the death of the prisoner would be certain.

After the victim had been left in that position for [about ten minutes], the rope was loosened and the body laid on the floor; Schiffer and I made sure that Hall was dead. Schiffer and Butz left the machine-room . . . to make sure that nobody would see us moving the body back into the cell. Storz and I then carried the body back to the same cell . . . In the right corner of this cell was placed a chair with a high and full back. Around this chair I tied a rope which I think I found on the same table where we found the piece of cloth that served to blindfold the prisoner; I tied the rope in such a way that it could fit Hall's head. Hall's body was then laid on the floor in a manner that anybody looking into the cell would have thought he had committed suicide.

Before I left the cell I remembered that I had failed to remove the handcuffs from the body, so I returned . . . and took them off. During the whole procedure in the cell Schiffer, Butz, and Storz were present, but nobody remembered that the prisoner's wrists were tied in the handcuffs. Schiffer then inspected the cell and was satisfied . . . Storz locked the cell and took the key along with him.

Johann Pinggera, who was responsible for all the internees in the prison, must have learned of Captain Hall's death . . . at the latest the next morning; . . . it is possible that Pinggera would doubt that Capt. Hall had committed suicide. . . . Pinggera had to submit a written report in which, as I heard later, he was ordered by Schiffer to state that Capt. Hall had many times threatened to commit suicide. This declaration by Pinggera is completely stupid because to my knowledge Pinggera did not speak any English nor did Hall speak any German or Italian. . . .

[The next afternoon] Storz and I . . . went as ordered to the cell . . . We took the uniform and shoes off the body. . . . The body was then wrapped into two blankets . . . so that it would not be identified . . . and carried by us upstairs to the rear entrance where Storz had already parked the 6-passenger car. . . . After the body was put into the car, I got in beside Storz, who was at the steering wheel, and we drove to the Concentration Camp. . . . Haage was at the entrance waiting for us and guided us through the camp. We stopped the car in front of one of the barracks where a coffin was already placed. If my memory does not fail, two or three of the camp guards took the body out of the car, unwrapped it, and placed it in the coffin. It is also probable that the rope which had been used to fake the suicide had been left around his neck.

Knowing the way of thinking of Dr. Harster as well as down to Sturmbannfuehrer Schiffer I am certain that the killing of Capt. Roderick Hall was executed with the full knowledge and approval of the highest authorities. In this connection I can state again . . . that Sturmbannfuehrer Thyrolf once declared before many members of Section 4, "Woe to him who brings a parachutist in to me alive". When one of those present objected that it was not always possible to find an excuse to shoot a paratrooper while he was trying to escape, Thyrolf answered that there always was a possibility.

Through the following I would like to point out the brutality and complete absence of any human feelings in Schiffer.

Schiffer had a . . . roll of demolition material in the drawer of his desk. During one of the interrogations of Capt. Hall, Schiffer showed this roll to Hall. Hall upon seeing it immediately warned Schiffer of the danger of having that stuff lying around like that, and Schiffer became very frightened and ordered that all of it be thrown into the River Talfer. Another batch of the same material

which was kept in the Corpo d'Armata was also thrown into the river since there was no other use for it. In spite of the fact that Schiffer received this frank warning . . . he nevertheless ordered Hall to be hanged, instead of being thankful for the escape from this danger.

* * *

CITATION FOR LEGION OF MERIT
POSTHUMOUS

Roderick G. S. [*sic*] Hall, . . . for exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services in Italy from 2 August 1944 to 27 January 1945. Volunteering for a special mission into enemy occupied territory, . . . Captain Hall parachuted into the region southeast of the Brenner Pass on 2 August 1944 and remained there, as a lone allied officer interrupting communications, collecting intelligence, and operating with partisans, during the course of which he was reported to have been twice-wounded and to have frozen both feet, during severe winter weather, in high mountains. . . . His unflinching courage . . . in undertaking an extremely hazardous operation alone [was] in keeping with the highest traditions . . . Next of kin: Mrs. Milton Dana Morrill, (Mother), 185 East Avenue, South Norwalk, Connecticut.

* * *

HEADQUARTERS
MEDITERRANEAN THEATER OF OPERATIONS
UNITED STATES ARMY
APO 512

GENERAL ORDERS
NUMBER 137:

19 July 1946

Heinz Andergassen, August Schiffer, and Albert Storz, . . . having been sentenced to be hanged by the neck until dead, . . . the sentence as to each accused will be carried into execution . . . on or before 26 July 1946 . . .

By Command of Lieutenant General Lee:

L. C. Jaynes
Major General, United States Army
Chief of Staff