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Karl Wolff, 84, Nazi SS general who surrendered troops in Italy

From combined dispatches

Karl Wolff, 84, the Nazi SS general who surrendered German troops in Italy in 1945, died yesterday in a hospital in Rosenheim, West Germany.

The cause of Gen. Wolff's death was not disclosed. In 1971, he suffered a heart attack, prompting his early release from a Bavarian prison where he was serving a 15-year sentence for war crimes.

Gen. Wolff, once described by a war crimes judge as a "bureaucrat of death," joined the Nazi Party in 1931 and rose quickly through the ranks to become adjutant to Heinrich Himmler, commander of the feared SS (Schutzstaffel—Security Detachment), by 1936. At the outbreak of World War II in 1939, he became liaison officer between the SS and Adolf Hitler's headquarters.

In 1943 he was appointed chief of police and SS commander in Italy. Gen. Wolff negotiated the early surrender of German troops in Italy with Allen Dulles, then the head of the U.S. Office of Strategic Services in Bern, Switzerland.

He held his first secret meeting with Mr. Dulles in March 1945 after deciding Germany could not win the war. German troops in Italy capitulated April 29, 1945, nine days before the Nazi regime's unconditional surrender.

The surrender gave Gen. Wolff a reputation for "humanitarian" actions. He was not charged by the international war crimes tribunal at Nuremberg, but was called to testify at trials of former colleagues.

Gen. Wolff was held in an Allied internment camp until 1949 and then released. He moved to Cologne, then later took up residence at Starnberg Lake outside Munich.

In 1962, Gen. Wolff was arrested and charged by the Munich state prosecutor with complicity in the deaths of 300,000 Jews at the Treblinka death camp in Poland and about 100 partisans and Jews on the Russian front.

He testified he had been ordered to attend the execution of the 100 prisoners but took no part in the killings. He maintained he was unaware of the fate of Jews sent to concentration camps.

However, the Munich court concluded Gen. Wolff served as Himmler's "eyes and ears" in deportations and thus was guilty of complicity in the killings.

Gen. Wolff was released periodically from prison beginning in 1969 for medical treatment, and was set free permanently after a heart attack in 1971.

His name surfaced most recently in 1983 in connection with the "Hitler diaries" hoax. Gen. Wolff was known to have had close contact with Gerd Heidemann, the reporter who claimed to have discovered diaries written by Hitler.

Gen. Wolff was born in Darmstadt, near Frankfurt. He served as a German army lieutenant in World War I and became a salesman before joining the Nazi movement.

He is survived by five children.