

The Last Days of Ernst Kaltenbrunner

Personal recollections of the capture and show trial of an intelligence chief.

The list of the 22 once exalted Nazis on trial at Nuremberg was led by the notorious names Goering, Hess, Ribbentrop, and Keitel, in that order. The man who came fifth, after Robert Ley's suicide, was not well known to the public, either in Germany or abroad. The prosecution was distressed that documents bearing his signature were few and far between. His name had rarely appeared in public print. The official Reich photographer, Heinrich Hoffman, had been unable to find in his extensive collection a likeness of the man. The press kept running some other Nazi official's photo to represent him and getting mixed up about what his position and duties had been. This obscurity was fitting and proper from the professional point of view, for Ernst Kaltenbrunner had headed the at last unified Reich intelligence and security services.

Succeeding after Reinhard Heydrich's assassination in June 1942¹ to the chieftainship of the Reichssicherheitshauptamt, Kaltenbrunner inherited the RSHA's ascendancy over Admiral Canaris' Abwehr which Heydrich had achieved, and eventually, with the assistance of circumstance, he contrived to have the Abwehr completely abolished and its main remnants made the RSHA's Militaerisches Amt, to be directed along with its foreign intelligence Amt VI by Walter Schellenberg. Amt III, under Ohlendorf, was the internal Sicherheitsdienst, and Mueller's Amt IV the Gestapo. But Kaltenbrunner's main interest lay in foreign affairs: according to Schellenberg he aspired to get hold of the foreign ministry in place of Ribbentrop, whom he hated.²

He was a powerful man. Even Himmler, to whom he theoretically reported, feared him: asked in April 1945 to receive some Swedish delegates from the Jewish World Congress, Himmler said to Schellenberg, "How am I going to do that with Kaltenbrunner around? I should then be completely at his mercy."³ (Schellenberg considered Kaltenbrunner, his immediate boss, to be one of his own "most active and dangerous enemies" and therefore worked closely with Himmler.) Kaltenbrunner, not Himmler, was entrusted with the investigation of the July 1944 attempt on Hitler. He often by-passed Himmler to report

directly to Hitler, with whom he had had personal ties since childhood, and toward the end spent several hours with him daily.⁴

On the Scent of the Chief Werewolf

After the Siegfried Line was breached and Nazi Germany began to fall apart, it was said that the hard core of Party leaders and their Waffen SS would hole up in a National Redoubt which they had made ready in the Austrian Alps and from there descend to prey like werewolves on the Allied occupation forces. This bad dream, of course, never came true, and later there was a good deal of scoffing at the "myth." But at the beginning of May in 1945 there was nothing mythical about either the Werewolves or the National Redoubt. As General Walter Bedell Smith said, "We had every reason to believe the Nazis intended to make their last stand among the crags."⁵ All of our intelligence pointed to the Alpine area east and south of Salzburg as the final fortress for the Goetterdaemmerung of the remaining Nazi fanatics. Reconnaissance photographs showed that they were installing bunkers and ammunition and supply depots in this mountain region. Interrogations of military and political prisoners indicated that government officers, ranking Party leaders, and the SS troops were moving to the Redoubt, leaving it to the Wehrmacht to stem the allied advance.

Under these circumstances the 80th Infantry Division, Third U.S. Army, was ordered back on May 3 from its meeting with the Russian troops at Steyr on the Enns river to a position about sixty kilometers north of the center of the National Redoubt area. I was in charge of the CIC team covering the area of the 80th Division's 319th Regiment. Interpreter Sydney Bruskin of New Haven, Connecticut, worked closely with me.

On May 5 we arrested and interrogated the Party leader of the village of Vorchdorf. He revealed that two days earlier August Eigruber, Gauleiter of Upper Austria, had passed through Vorchdorf on his way to Gmunden on Traunsee, a fashionable resort about sixty kilometers east of Salzburg in the foothills of the mountain Redoubt. Gmunden was beyond our prescribed area, but a Gauleiter was too tempting a quarry; there were

only four in Austria, 42 in all the Greater Reich. So we took up the pursuit. But in Gmunden the Austrian police told us that during the previous week not only Eigruber but also Kaltenbrunner and Reichsleiter Ley of the German Labor Front had passed through. Here was big game indeed. They had been headed for the heart of the Redoubt in the Salzkammergut, a mountain fastness dotted with salt mines and extending from Attersee through St. Wolfgang and Bad Ischl to Bad Aussee in the Steiermark.

Proceeding the same day up the long Traunsee shore into the Redoubt area with a tank battalion, Sid and I were afforded the opportunity to examine a concrete manifestation of Kaltenbrunner's work, the concentration camp at Ebensee. Part of the Mauthausen extermination system built up by Kaltenbrunner when he had been the "Little Himmler" of Austria, it seemed more horrible even than Dachau or Ohrdruf. Bodies that one would never have believed could exist alive were walking around, covered with sores and lice. The filth was indescribable. Adjacent to the crematorium were rooms piled high with shrunken nude bodies, lye thrown over them to combat the stench and vermin. The excess bodies that couldn't be handled at the crematorium were hauled by the wagonload to another part of the enclosure, where they were dumped into open pits filled with a chemical solution. Worse still was the hospital, where the dying and sick had been herded for experimentation before being carted off to the crematorium. There were no beds in it; the inmates lay on shelves covered with dirty rags, groups of two or three huddled together like mice to keep warm. As we entered they put out their hands and begged for food. When we told them we had none, but that the American medics and military government personnel would be along immediately, they broke down and sobbed, "We have waited for you four, five, six years. Now you come empty-handed."

On the next day, May 6, we seemed about to close in on Kaltenbrunner, the man who shared with Himmler and SSI General Poehl responsibility for the whole system of Nazi concentration camps. We had pushed sixteen kilometers into the Redoubt without encountering any sign of resistance and reached Bad Ischl, home of Franz Lehar and formerly the summer residence of Emperor Franz Josef I. Here we were told "on reliable authority" that at that moment Kaltenbrunner and his wife were in Strobl, a town ten kilometers to the west. Our informant, who wore the uniform of a Wehrmacht lieutenant, was a local leader in the Austrian Freedom Movement which had sprung up in opposition to the

Nazis. This Movement did in fact give invaluable aid to the CIC in tracking down the Nazi leaders: about 80% of our arrests of SS, Gestapo, Sicherheitsdienst, and Party leaders in Austria were due directly to leads received from it.

The lieutenant offered to drive me to Strobl with his interpreter, a German soldier, and to have a second car with other members of the Freedom Movement follow us. Suppressing my suspicions of this quick proposal I left Sid in Bad Ischl to organize an informant net and set out with the volunteer escort. I was thankful for their Wehrmacht uniforms when we found the road clogged with remnants of General Sepp Dietrich's Sixth SS Panzer Army retreating before the Russians. We were not bothered. The war was effectively at an end, anyway, and the main bulk of the SS, like the Wehrmacht, was glad to call a halt to the fighting; it was mostly fanatics and the underground that worried us now.

In Strobl, the burgermeister admitted in a trembling voice, that the Kaltenbrunner party had been staying at an estate on the outskirts of town. We drove to this estate, parked the two cars at the entrance to the grounds, and walked from there to the house. Several men in civilian clothes followed but did not stop us. At the house we were greeted by a large blond woman of about 38 years, who immediately acknowledged that she was Mrs. Ernst Kaltenbrunner. With her were her three young children but no husband. I informed her that she was under arrest for purposes of interrogation and, to impress the civilian bodyguard, mentioned the imminent arrival of American soldiers. We then escorted her down to the car, still followed by her silent bodyguard. At the car their leader finally spoke, in perfect English: he and his men had personally been instructed by General Kaltenbrunner to safeguard Mrs. Kaltenbrunner and the children; only yesterday, however, he had heard on the radio that General Eisenhower had ordered all civilians to turn their weapons in to local burgermeisters, and he had told his men to comply; they therefore had no means to carry out their assigned mission. It was apparent that the will to resist was gone.

Back in Bad Ischl, our informants helped us pin-point the center of the National Redoubt as being in the vicinity of the mountain town of Alt Aussee, thirty kilometers to the south and well up in the Totes Gebirge range. We took this information, and Mrs. Kaltenbrunner, back to the 80th Division command post at Voecklabruck. Interrogated, Mrs. Kaltenbrunner acknowledged that her husband had been with her at

their Strobl estate as recently as May 3. He had presided over a meeting attended by the following important Nazi officials: Neubacher, ambassador to Belgrade; General Glaise-Horstenau, minister to Croatia; Gauleiter Rainer of Salzburg; RSHA foreign intelligence area chiefs Wilhelm Waneck and Wilhelm Hoettl; SS Oberfuehrer Muehlmann; Otto Skorzeny, leader of the RSHA sabotage units. Kaltenbrunner, she said, knew the Alt Aussee area well from summer visits he had made when he was the "Little Himmler" of Austria. She described him as 43 years old, six feet four inches tall, weighing 220 pounds, having a powerful build and dark features, with deep scars on both sides of his face.

A task force of tanks and infantry under Major Ralph Pearson was ordered to the Alt Aussee area, and I was instructed to join them there. It was now V-E day. Sid Bruskin and I left Voecklabruck at four in the morning on May 9. As we drove up over the Poetschen pass, it was difficult to keep our minds on the mission, so beautiful was the scenery. The road led up beside a rushing mountain stream that cascaded merrily down the rocks in steep descent, its spray sparkling in the early morning sun. Above and around us were snowcapped peaks, and the green alms on either side were brightly splashed with mountain flowers. We rested in Bad Aussee and then climbed the last four kilometers into Alt Aussee, a town of 4,000 at the end of a winding mountain road, the last village in the ascent up the Totes Gebirge. Nestled on the west shore of Alt Ausseersee, it looks across the deep, cold lake to the Trisslwand Peak on the east and over the Loser Alm on the north shore to the snowcapped summit of the Totes Gebirge range.

Alt Aussee was for the Viennese what Lake Tahoe is for Californians. Three Gauleiters--Henlein, Jury, and Eigruber--had their summer homes there. Prince Chlodwig Hohenlohe-Schillingsfurst, the largest landowner in the Salzkammergut, was born and now lived there. Prince Hohenlohe, who had lived for a decade in New York with an American wife, made transparent attempts to ingratiate himself with us. He got us living quarters in the Hotel Eibl and offices in one of his villas down the street. He invited us to tea and apologized for his poor hospitality, saying that the Nazis made him live in his barn. (Later he was arrested for interrogation, after Kaltenbrunner told 12th Army Group interrogators that he had been Ribbentrop's observer in Spain and Portugal and had produced a mine of information regarding the United States and Latin America.⁶)

We established an informant net from our "white list" of anti-Nazis and

the most knowledgeable and trustworthy members of the Freedom Movement. This latter group was headed by Johann Brandauer, the assistant burgermeister. Rumors were rife that Kaltenbrunner, Ley, Eigruber, Kreisleiter Stichnot of Gmunden, and strong groups of SS troops and high SS officers were hiding out in the recesses of the Totes Gebirge. From May 9 to May 11 we worked sixteen or eighteen hours a day trying to get some clue to Kaltenbrunner's whereabouts.

Our first important contact was with Albrecht Gaiswinkler, a British agent who had been parachuted into the area on April 20. A native of Bad Aussee, he had been drafted into the Wehrmacht, had deserted in France, turning a Nazi supply train over to the French Maquis, and when the Third Army liberated Alsace had given himself up to the Americans. The Americans had turned him over to the British, to whom the Aussee area was allocated for future occupation. Gaiswinkler had learned that Wilhelm Waneck, Chief of the RSHA Intelligence Section for Southeastern Europe--and one of Kaltenbrunner's May 3 conferees at Strobl--was now operating a wireless transmitting station in the Kerry Villa located on a hill at the outskirts of Alt Aussee. Working with Waneck were his deputy, Wilhelm Hoettl, (another of the conferees), Werner Goettsch, who had earlier held Waneck's job and now was a sort of chief ideologist for the RSHA, and a number of other Nazi officials.

Thanks to Gaiswinkler's effective groundwork, Sid and I were able to arrest this group, seal its headquarters at the Kerry Villa, and stop the operation of its transmitter. We did not know then that this was the central communications center for the National Redoubt and Kaltenbrunner's only connection with the outside world; its importance and the feverish activities of the Goettsch-Waneck group during the preceding month were revealed only later after detailed interrogation of the principals. For the moment our attention was all on locating Kaltenbrunner, and these people gave no leads on his whereabouts except the information that he had been at Alt Aussee on May 3.

We located and arrested many lesser Nazis who had fled to Alt Aussee, seeking for the most part time to collect their thoughts and prepare their anti-Nazi alibis--Gunther Altenburg, Minister Plenipotentiary to Greece; General Erich Alt of the Luftwaffe; Joseph Heider, who had been detailed by Eigruber to blow up the Alt Aussee salt mines wherein was stored a fabulous collection of looted art treasures for the projected Great Hitler Museum in Linz; Dr. Hjalmar Mae, head of the puppet state in Esthonia; Walter Riedel, construction chief for the V-2 weapons at

Peenemuende; Ernst Szargarus, Foreign Office secretary in Rome; Spiros Hadji Kyriakos, Under Governor of the National Bank of occupied Greece; William Knothe, General Counsel of the Foreign Office; Dr. Carlos Wetzell, head of the pharmaceutical industry; and Dr. Bailent Homan, minister in the Hungarian puppet government.

As we cast about during those three days for traces of Kaltenbrunner's movements, we sorted out the diverse social groups in Alt Aussee, each busy trying to establish its anti-Nazi premise. There was the artist's group, with movie actors Ernst von Klipstein and Lotte Koch, the Viennese theater star Unterkirchner, the aged composer Wolf-Ferrari, the sensational pianist-composer-conductor Peter Kreuder, self-styled "Cole Porter of Germany," the composer and conductor Nico Dostal, the Austrian tenor and movie star Johannes Heesters, and many members of the Vienna symphony orchestra. More intriguing from the CIC viewpoint was the old German nobility group of Countess Platen and Herbert von Hindenburg, nephew of the Field Marshal, because they had living with them one Jean Schils, a Dutch intelligence man who claimed to have been a member of the anti-Nazi underground, and a certain Norman Bailey-Stewart. Schils gave us several false leads on "V-3 weapons" supposed to be located nearby in a Russian-occupied area, and seemed in general bent on provoking incidents between the Russians and the Americans.

One day Schils came into the office to volunteer information on the whereabouts of Gauleiter Eigruber and brought Bailey-Stewart along as his interpreter. It soon became apparent that Bailey-Stewart was deliberately misinterpreting everything Schils said, and he was acting very abnormally. About 35 and unusually good-looking, he showed his impatience with the dullness of the business at hand. I questioned him alone, and he turned out to be England's famous "Officer in the Tower" of the thirties, eager to tell the world the sequel to those early espionage activities--his work for the Nazis in the war just ending.

In 1932, according to his account, returning as a second lieutenant from duty in India, he was disillusioned with England's imperial policy. He volunteered for the German secret service and was sent back to London to collect order-of-battle information. Discovered through the alertness of the English censors, he was tried amid much publicity and sentenced to five years in the Tower of London. When his family's influence obtained his release in 1936 he went to Vienna, watched now not only by the English secret service but also by the Gestapo and Schuschnigg's

and Skubl's Austrian police. He applied for Austrian citizenship. The English picked him up in 1938 and accused him of smuggling arms into Austria to help the then illegal Nazi Party. The charges were not proved, however, and with the Anschluss he became a German citizen. In the same year he was questioned by RSHA agents about his criticism of Nazi propaganda beamed to England, and his criticism was so good that he was flown to Berlin and given a job in the Rundfunk, where in 1939 he began what were to become later, under William Joyce, the Lord Haw Haw programs. But about this time he was reported to have made remarks detrimental to the Nazi State, and he became involved in personal antagonisms. Through a friend in the Foreign Ministry he was given a job in its wireless department. In March 1944 he was sent to Vienna. In December, having been called to service in the Volksturm, he gave a false address and departed for Alt Aussee.

All this was very interesting, but it did not advance the Kaltenbrunner chase. We arrested Bailey-Stewart on behalf of the British and went back to our job. The most promising set of people in Alt Aussee for our purposes was the one comprising Countess Gisela von Westarp, Iris Scheidler, and Dr. Rudolf Praxmarar.

Gisela von Westarp was Kaltenbrunner's mistress. A pretty blonde of twenty-two with blue eyes, vivacious and extremely intelligent, she had been working at Himmler's Berlin headquarters when Kaltenbrunner came from Vienna in early 1943 to take over the RSHA. On March 12, 1945, she bore him twins, Ursula and Wolfgang, in a cowshed in Alt Aussee. I still have a letter she wrote to her mother describing the event, declaring that she "almost deserved the Mother Cross," and pointing out that Mrs. Kaltenbrunner had taken twelve years to produce only three children. One of the twins' godfathers, Gisela told me proudly, was Hitler's personal physician, Dr. Karl Brandt.

Iris Scheidler was the wife of Arthur Scheidler, formerly adjutant to Heydrich and now to Kaltenbrunner. She was thirty years old, an attractive society brunette, seemingly intent on having a good time. She and Gisela were good friends with many of those in the Hitler inner circle, especially Heinrich Hoffman, the Reich photographer who had introduced Eva Braun to Hitler, Eva Braun herself, Baldur von Schirach, Hitler Youth leader and later Gauleiter of Vienna, and Herman Fegelein, the SS General who acted as liaison officer between Hitler and Himmler.

Dr. Rudolph Praxmarar had once been Iris' husband, and they still had

great affection for each other. He had been a classmate and friend of Kaltenbrunner's at the University of Graz and then became a prominent physician in Vienna. Now he was the SS Chief of Hospitals and military commander of Alt Aussee. He was about 50 years old, with a genial personality and the reputation of being a great sportsman. But we received from Freedom Movement informants in the SS hospitals an accusation against him signed by members of his own staff. It read in part:

Until two days prior to the entry of the American Task Force into Alt Aussee, Praxmarar kept active association with the bloodhound Kaltenbrunner. He has not been afraid to shelter him in the hospital and provide him with medicines and food and weapons. Arms were loaded into a car at night to help Kaltenbrunner escape to the mountains. Praxmarar, prior to the arrival of the Americans, tried to force several of the patients into the Kampfgruppe Kaltenbrunner for the purpose of staging a last stand in the mountains. He also tried to get one hundred men from Georg [Gaiswinkler] for the same purpose. Under the pretext of angina pectoris he took into the safety of his hospital the Kaltenbrunner Gestapo chief in Vienna, SS Brigadier General Huber.

We found Huber still in the hospital and arrested him. Praxmarar we didn't arrest until several days later, when we had received further proof of his complicity with Kaltenbrunner.

The Quarry Taken

Finally, on the morning of May 11, we received our first solid piece of information on the location of Kaltenbrunner's hideout. Johann Brandauer reported that the Alt Aussee forest ranger--a member of the Freedom Movement--had seen General Kaltenbrunner, Scheidler, and two SS guards five days before in a cabin called Wildensee Huette atop the Totes Gebirge. Though the tip was five days old, it had the merit of coming from a reliable source: Brandauer was one of our closest and most trustworthy collaborators. I therefore asked him to bring me

immediately two reliable Austrians who knew the mountain trails to serve as guides.

Brandauer brought not two but four Austrian guides, all former Wehrmacht soldiers. They said it would take us five hours to reach the cabin. There would still be from twenty to thirty feet of snow on the ground, and no cover for us except drifts on the last four kilometers of the way up to the cabin. We would have to leave before midnight to arrive under cover of darkness and while the crust on the snow was still hard. I would dress in Austrian costume--lederhosen, Alpine jacket and hat, and spiked shoes. I would approach the cabin alone; the Austrians were not willing to come closer than five hundred yards. I would go up unarmed so as not to draw fire or arouse suspicion. I would pose as a passer-by crossing the mountains on the way to Steyrling, in the next valley: there were many Wehrmacht deserters and fleeing Nazis whose safest and most expedient mode of travel was by foot over the mountains. If Kaltenbrunner was not there I would come out immediately.

This was a sensible plan. That it was executed stumbingly was due to the fact that Major Pearson, the task force commander, insisted on sending a squad of his boys along. I was afraid their presence might bring on a pitched battle, leaving either a dead or an escaped Kaltenbrunner, and my arguments achieved at least the compromise agreement that I would have authority to use the infantry squad in any manner I saw fit. I ordered it to stay well to the rear and on the approach to the cabin keep under cover out of sight.

After this matter had been arranged, on the afternoon of the eleventh, I sent for Gisela. She was extremely anxious to find out what information we had regarding Kaltenbrunner. I told her we had some leads and asked her to write a note to him urging him to accompany the bearer into safe custody with the Americans rather than let himself be taken, and probably killed, by the Russians. After a moment's thought she complied. Later that afternoon we were visited by several delegations from the Gisela-Iris group--first Hans Unterkirchner, the Viennese actor, then Lotte Koch and Ernst von Klipstein, then Praxmarar and Iris--all fishing for information.

Iris was apparently most concerned about the safety of her husband Arthur Scheidler. Although she was going to have a baby in six weeks, she insisted that she be allowed to accompany any patrol that might go

off into the mountains after him, arguing that if she were in evidence there would be no shooting on the part of the Kaltenbrunner group. Thinking that she might indeed be useful in this way, I told her she could come; but then she backed down. Never quite sure what the maneuverings of these friends of Kaltenbrunner might mean, I sent Sid to the Gisela-Iris house to keep an eye on them for the next twelve hours.

That night at 11:30 p.m. the patrol assembled in the CIC office for final briefing. The infantry boys, although they had volunteered for this mission, were a little dubious about the plan as outlined, and especially about being guided by former German soldiers. They wanted it made clear that if they made a single false step the guides would be dead ducks; after coming through the war alive they didn't want to get killed with peace and home in sight.

As we started off at midnight the squad of soldiers loaded with their rifles, hand grenades, and ammunition seemed to make as much noise as a company of tanks rolling through the streets; it would be evident to the village people that a patrol was leaving. We walked past the See Hotel, where one of Praxmarar's SS hospitals was quartered, past Fischerndorf, along the Alt Ausseersee shore, and then began to climb. There were unexpected obstacles: trees swept down by heavy snowslides lay across the path, and the foot bridge over the Stammern stream had been carried away in the spring floods. Up through the timber, up past the timber line we wound our way, snake-like over the hairpin trail. The infantry, weapon-laden and without spiked shoes, slowed us down, and it was soon clear that we could not keep to our schedule. Three of the soldiers, injured by falls, were dropped along the way.

At 5 a.m., as day began to touch the sky, we finally reached a snow-covered pass from which through glasses we could see the Wildensee Huette. It lay across a great expanse of exposed down-slope and then up a long bare ridge, just below the crest. We nevertheless decided to proceed directly, in full view, rather than take a circuitous route to gain cover from overhanging crags. It was getting late; everybody was thoroughly tired from breaking through the crust calf-deep at every step; and the cabin appeared to be utterly deserted.

Behind a ridge of snow some 300 yards from the cabin I left the four Austrian guides and what remained of the infantry squad and worked

my way around to the blind west side of the cabin, taking advantage of any cover there was. As I was laughing at myself for being so cautious in approaching an evidently deserted cabin, I heard a bird-call signal off to the right. No, it was a bird, apparently as lonesome as I felt. The cabin, I could see, was a typical Alpine hut--two rooms, a wood shelter, a porch that faced down the slope in the direction we had come. The shutters were tight closed; no smoke was coming from the chimney; no fresh foottracks were visible in the snow.

I walked onto the porch and knocked at the door. There was no response. I tried the door and found it locked. But then a sleepy groan came from the left-hand room. I knocked loudly on the window shutter. Someone got out of bed and walked across the room. The shutter opened, revealing a rough-looking man of about 35, not Kaltenbrunner. "Was suchen?" he asked. I said in very American-sounding German that I was cold and wanted to come in. But he clearly wasn't going to ask me in, so I came straight to the point and handed him Gisela's note to Kaltenbrunner.

He read it carefully, but then said he didn't know these people, he was just a passer-by on his way down to Bad Ischl. At that moment he looked over my shoulder down the slope, and saw the four guides coming up with rifles slung over their shoulders; observing that nothing had happened to me, they had decided that there was no danger. He quickly crossed the room and took a revolver from his trousers hanging beside the bed. I retreated to the protection of the cabin's west side, and he slammed the shutter shut. The guides, alarmed, brought the eight infantry boys up in a half-circle around the front of the cabin. While this maneuver was being executed, the man in the cabin opened the door and came out on the porch, perhaps to negotiate, but when he saw the reinforcements he quickly reentered, slamming and bolting the door behind him.

With the men in position, we called out to the occupants to come out with their hands over their heads. For ten minutes we kept repeating this call, with no results. Not wishing to start shooting, we went onto the porch and began to knock down the door. But immediately it opened and four men walked out with their hands over their heads. They had decided to come peacefully after all.

Inside the cabin we found four Wehrmacht rifles, four revolvers, a large quantity of ammunition, two machine pistols, and a machine gun, the

latter hidden in the recess of the chimney. Also a case of empty champagne bottles, some French bonbons, some American tax-free cigarettes, and a large quantity of counterfeit American and British money. In the ash pit at the base of the chimney was a picture of Kaltenbrunner with his wife and children, a copy of his last radio message to Fegelein for Himmler and Hitler, his identification card as Chief of the SIPO and SD, and his metal identification discs as number two man (Himmler was number one) of the Gestapo and the Kriminalpolizei.

I interrogated each of the four men. Two of them admitted they were SS guards, but claimed they had no connection with Kaltenbrunner. And Kaltenbrunner and Scheidler, although there was no mistaking at least the former, refused to admit their identities. They had false papers, Kaltenbrunner those of a doctor discharged from the Wehrmacht, and he carried a medical kit and all the usual accessories. (Later he took pains to explain that these papers were not forged, but the authentic identification of deceased persons. This rather fine distinction was characteristic of his efforts to appear an Austrian gentleman and a good Catholic.) He stood rigidly at attention during the interrogation, trying to create a good initial impression by being earnest and cooperative. Scheidler was the antithesis. He made no attempt to hide his wrath.

His eyes flashed furiously at me as we swung heavy packs onto the four men for our trip down to the village.

At 11:30 in the morning we arrived back in Alt Aussee, where word had apparently circulated that a mountain patrol was returning: a crowd was gathered in the village street. As we passed Prince Hohenlohe, he remarked, "I see you have your man Kaltenbrunner," and at the same time Iris and Gisela broke from the throng and ran up and embraced their respective men. Kaltenbrunner and Scheidler now had to drop their masks.

The Last Days

In time, through the interrogation and testimony of Kaltenbrunner and others,⁷ it was possible to piece together the story of his recent efforts

to salvage something from the German defeat. On April 18 Himmler had named him Commander in Chief of all forces in southern Europe. He had reorganized his intelligence services as a stay-behind underground net, dividing the command up between Otto Skorzeny, head of the sabotage units, and Wilhelm Waneck, whose radio station in the Kerry Villa, kept in contact not only with Kaltenbrunner and other centers in the Redoubt and in Germany, but also with stay-behind agents in the southern European capitals.

Waneck, however, with Werner Goettsch, Wilhelm Hoettl, and others, concluding as early as 1943 that the Nazis would lose the war, had been intriguing for a negotiated peace with the western allies and a common front against Russia. The plan was to set up an independent Austrian state in rebellion against the Nazi Reich and supported by the Anglo-Americans. Goettsch had valuable contacts among the Vienna Socialists, and one idea had been to send Karl Doppler to the United States to broach the plan because he had the same masonic degrees as President Roosevelt. Kaltenbrunner was informed of this conspiracy and gave tacit assent, though he could not actively participate. Later other Socialists were brought in, including Karl Winkler, who had contacts with America and England through Draja Mihailovich, and Raffael Spann and Professor Heinrich, who had an excellent contact in England, their friend Major Christie at the Travellers Club, London. Attempts in 1944 to contact Major Christie by letter failed, however; and an opportunity provided by Mihailovich to get in touch with the American Legation in Belgrade was lost when Belgrade was occupied.

Finally, in March 1945, according to the interrogation reports, Hoettl went to Switzerland with the Polish Count Potocki, with whose help and that of Prince Alois Auersperg, a former Abwehr officer implicated in the July 1944 attempt on Hitler's life, he was able to get into touch with Mr. Schultze-Gaevernitz, a member of the American Embassy, and through him with Allen Dulles.⁸ Through Auersperg and a Dr. Kurt Grimm, Austrian Freedom Movement representative, Hoettl also had contact with a Mr. Leslie of an Allied Commission in Berne. The Americans, he was told, did not want a strong Russian influence in Austria, and they were particularly interested in Kaltenbrunner's attitude toward an independent Austrian state.

With this information Hoettl, Waneck, and Goettsch were able to urge Kaltenbrunner to set up a rival Austrian government to the Russian-sponsored one in Vienna, which the western allies refused in April to

recognize. Kaltenbrunner held two meetings with members of this Free Austria group--Neubacher, Glaise-Horstenau, Muehlmann, Hayler, Pschikril, Hoettl, Goettsch, and Waneck--at which a provisional cabinet was discussed and it was decided that Kaltenbrunner, in accordance with American wishes, should be an advisor. Having now full powers in southern Europe, Kaltenbrunner was in an excellent position to use his reorganized intelligence services as a bargaining counter with the Allies.

On April 26, at Strobl, Hoettl reported to Kaltenbrunner, Glaise-Horstenau, Neubacher, Muehlmann, Waneck, and Goettsch on the results of a second visit to Switzerland. It was agreed at this time to try to arrange a meeting between Allen Dulles and Kaltenbrunner at Feldkirch, in Austria near the Swiss border. During the next few days Kaltenbrunner met with Field Marshall Kesselring and Lieutenant General Winter at Koenigsee regarding the project. But the sands were running out; the war was coming to an unexpectedly rapid end. Kaltenbrunner could pursue the political way out no longer. Facing capture as the Russian and American troops closed in, he retired to Alt Aussee to bid Gisela farewell and from there with his two SS guards and his adjutant Scheidler made the ascent to the mountain hideout among the snowy crags of the Totes Gebirge.

Interrogated now briefly by the 80th CIC at Alt Aussee before being sent on to Third Army and 12th Army Group, Kaltenbrunner said that he had intended to come down from his retreat after things had quieted down and, on the basis of the underground forces at his command, his Free Austria project, and his knowledge of Bolshevism, come to terms with the western allies: "If there is one man in Europe who knows Bolshevism, it is I." We allowed Gisela and Iris a last tearful farewell before sending the two men on to higher headquarters. There was a plan afoot which never materialized to have Kaltenbrunner talk with General Eisenhower and then issue a statement calling on the underground to end all resistance.

During subsequent interrogations Kaltenbrunner remained very cooperative, intent on establishing his alibi. At Third Army he said that with Hitler's consent he "began in 1945 to use the foreign intelligence service to counteract Ribbentrop's pernicious influence and to find a political way out." He wrote a letter to his wife, Lisl, clearly designed for American eyes:

My own destiny lies in the hands of God. I am glad that I never separated from Him. . . . I cannot believe that I shall be held responsible for the mistakes of our leaders, for in the short time of my activity I have striven hard for a reasonable attitude, both internal and external.... They ought to have paid more attention to my words. . . . We have no property worth mentioning. Perhaps the only resource for you will be my small stamp collection.... Was it not my duty to open the door to socialism and freedom as we imagined and desired them? ... I have not given up hope that the truth will be found out and for a just legal decision.

But he never disclaimed his positive relationship with Hitler, one apparently bordering on adoration. His subordinate Wilhelm Hoettl said of him that he "was fascinated by Hitler, believed in him without reservation He believed he had a mission to serve Hitler with his entire RSHA He came to believe that Hitler was the man sent by God. This developed into a mania."

In July Kaltenbrunner was sent to British Interrogation Center O20 outside of London. Here, at a time when the horrors of the concentration camps were being brought to light, he was seized on as the first prisoner that had played a significant and responsible part in the extermination program. He was given third-degree treatment, I learned later from an American intelligence officer working on the case. The result was that henceforth he not only did not cooperate but refused even to admit he had any responsibility at all in the Nazi system. He refused to admit that he knew men who had been his closest associates. He denied that he had ever been near a concentration camp. He refused to admit that he signed orders incarcerating persons in concentration camps. In short, he denied from this time on any connection with Nazi crimes or persons responsible for such crimes. He was flown to Nuremberg for the trial in handcuffs--the only one of the 21 major defendants treated in this manner.

In November, two weeks before the scheduled opening of the trial, I was sent to Nuremberg to set up a security plan: the American military commanders were becoming anxious about "lone-wolf assassins," and Robert Ley had succeeded in committing suicide despite supposedly elaborate precautions. To test the Palace of Justice security system, another CIC man and I tried penetrating without proper credentials to

the inner cell block which housed the 21 defendants. We succeeded, as anybody might have done, in passing through the four interior guard posts without the required Red Pass. A fifth post guarded the individual cells. I asked to see Kaltenbrunner and was readily admitted upon signing the registration book.

Kaltenbrunner looked gaunt and pale. He clearly showed the effects of what he had been through since I saw him on May 12. He gave no indication of wanting to remember, me; it seemed as if he had mesmerized himself into a state of complete forgetfulness. Only when I mentioned the name Gisela he nodded and asked several questions about her and the twins. But that was all.

On the opening day of the trial, to everyone's great disappointment, Kaltenbrunner was not in the prisoners' dock; he had been stricken with a cerebral hemorrhage the night before. It was three weeks before he was well enough to make his plea, "I do not believe I have made myself guilty in the sense of the indictment." On December 10 I was present at the scene described in the press release of the International Military Tribunal's public relations office:

Ernst Kaltenbrunner received a cool welcome from his co-defendants when he made his initial appearance at the trial Monday afternoon. Entering the prisoners' dock just before the afternoon session began, no welcoming hands were proffered to greet him. When he offered to shake hands with some of the defendants there was a noticeable reluctance on their part. Taking his seat in the dock between Wilhelm Keitel and Alfred Rosenberg, he tried to engage his neighbors in a conversation without much luck. ... When he was approached by his own defense council, Kaltenbrunner held out his hand. His lawyer had, however, with studied casualness locked his hands behind his back.

I walked down beside Kaltenbrunner during the intermission that afternoon. He recognized me and motioned that he wanted to speak with me. That was not permitted. I had received that day through the mail a note from Gisela for him, a girlish love-note telling him that his heart must never grow cold, that she was thinking of him and would always love him. I handed it to Kaufman, Kaltenbrunner's defense counsel. AP correspondent Daniel DeLuce, however, who was talking

with Kaufman at the time, appropriated it and wrote a story on it. Kaltenbrunner presumably never found out that Gisela was keeping the home fires burning.

Later that week Kaltenbrunner was stricken with a recurrence of the cerebral hemorrhage, and could not return to the dock until January. But he survived through the entire trial, to be hanged on October 15, 1946, with eleven of his co-defendants.

1 For the story behind Heydrich's death see *Studies* IV 1, p. 1.

2 Folke Bernadotte, *The Curtain Falls*, p. 142.

3 Deposition of Walter Schellenberg, Document No. 2990-PS, November 18, 1945, Office of Chief U.S. Counsel, Nuremberg.

4 Bernadotte, op. cit., pp. 133,139; Walter Schellenberg, *The Labyrinth*, *passim*.

5 "Eisenhower's Six Great Decisions," *Saturday Evening Post*, July 13, 1946, p. 26.

6 HQ 12th Army Group Intermediate Interrogation Report, June 28, 1945.

7 Notably Wilhelm Hoettl (Third Army Preliminary Interrogation Report No. 17, June 1945), Wilhelm Waneck (12th Army Group Intermediate Interrogation Report, June 21, 1945), and Werner Goettsch (USFET Final Interrogation Report No. 8, July 24, 1945)

8 This approach, if it was made, was carried out by the intermediaries: Hoettl did not in fact meet with Allen Dulles, and probably not with Gaevernitz.

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