

## Background Information

# The Last Days in Hitler's Shelter

Fraulein Hanna Reitsch was one of the last people to leave Hitler's air-raid shelter in Berlin alive, and this article is compiled from the replies that she has given under recent interrogation, and from reports written by her since capture. The idea of "honour" was almost an obsession with her, and it is the opinion of her interrogators that, in general, her story may be accepted as reliable. Indeed, the picture that she gives of the last hour in the bunker, of Hitler, Eva Braun, Goebbels and others, has a true ring about it, and is an unwittingly revealing story.

Hanna Reitsch is a well-known test pilot and expert in aeronautical research; she is also a very brave woman. General Koller, the German Chief of Air Staff, who met her soon after she left the bunker, said: "She is personally very brave, that has to be admitted; but she has no ideas about anything else." She was obsessed with the idea of loyalty to the Fuehrer and certain in her mind that Goering was largely to blame for the collapse of Germany.

The events in the bunker, as related in this article, adequately illustrate the final disintegration of Hitler's Germany. The last letters, which are included in this article, are given together with an assessment of the value by Reitsch.

### **The Trip to Berlin**

On 24th April Hitler telegraphed to Munich, urgently summoning General Ritter von Greim to Berlin. The capital was already nearly surrounded by the Red army, so Greim first decided to fly in an autogiro, with Hanna Reitsch as pilot, and to land in the gardens of the Reich Chancellery. When they arrived at Rechlin airfield, however, the only autogiro was out of action, so a Luftwaffe pilot who had flown Speer to Hitler two days earlier was chosen: Hanna begged to be taken too. The Focke-Wulf 190 had a pick-a-back space for one passenger (Greim), and Hanna was stuffed into the tail through a small emergency opening. With an escort of forty fighters they left Rechlin on the night of 25th/26th April and, after a running fight with Russian aircraft in which many of the escorting fighters were shot down, successfully landed at Gatow, the only Berlin airfield still in German hands.

To telephone to the Chancellery was impossible: all lines were cut. Greim as pilot, and Hanna Reitsch as passenger, took off in a Fieseler-Storch under a whirling cover of German-Russian dog-fights. At a height of a few metres they managed to get away from the airfield and to fly at tree-top level towards the Brandenburger Tor. Street fighting was going on below them, and numberless Russian fighters were in the air. Heavy fire tore out the bottom of the aircraft, severely injuring Greim's right foot. Hanna reached over his shoulders for the controls and, with the plane dodging and squirming close to the ground, succeeded at last in landing on the East-West axis, which was under heavy Russian artillery and small-arms fire. They commandeered a passing vehicle to take them to Hitler's shelter, and Greim's shattered foot was given first-aid treatment on the way.

It was between 6 and 7 o'clock in the evening of 26th April when they reached the shelter. Frau Goebbels fell upon Hanna with tears and kisses, astonished that anyone still had the courage and loyalty to come to the Fuehrer when so many had deserted him. Greim was immediately taken to have his foot tended by Hitler's physician.

### **Betrayed by Goering**

Hitler entered the sick-room, according to Reitsch, with his face full of gratitude at Greim's coming. He murmured something to the effect that even a soldier has the right to disobey an order when everything shows the futility and hopelessness of obedience.

"Do you know why I have sent for you?"

"No, my Fuehrer."

"Because Hermann Goering has betrayed and deceived both me and his country. Behind my back he has made contacts with the enemy. He carries the brand of cowardice. Against my orders he has gone to save himself at Berchtesgaden. He sent me a disrespectful telegram saying that I had once named him my successor and that now, as I could no longer rule from Berlin, he was preparing to rule from Berchtesgaden in my place. He said that unless he had a reply from me by nine-thirty on the same evening he would assume that I agreed."