

FELIX BOHR

# VOR DEM UNTERGANG

HITLERS JAHRE IN  
DER »WOLFSSCHANZE«



SUHRKAMP

Felix Bohr

# BEFORE THE DOWNFALL

*Hitler's Years in the "Wolf's Lair"*

Original title: Vor dem Untergang

Hitlers Jahre in der »Wolfsschanze«

Hardcover, 300 pages


Publication date: 14 April 2025

© Suhrkamp Verlag Berlin 2025

Sample Translation by Joel Scott

Taken from the prologue, chapters II, V, and VIII, and the epilogue

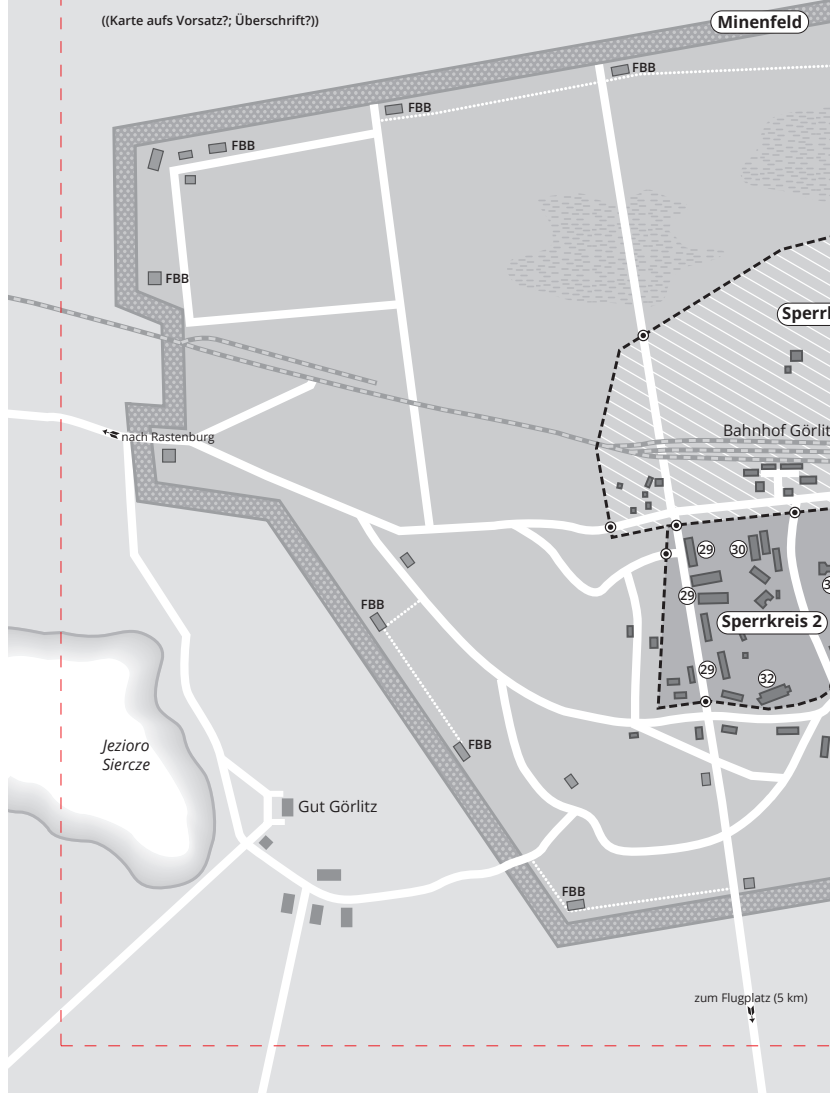
*Both the content and the graphic design of this sample translation are protected by copyright, and may only be used for the purposes of rights sales. Please treat this document confidentially.*

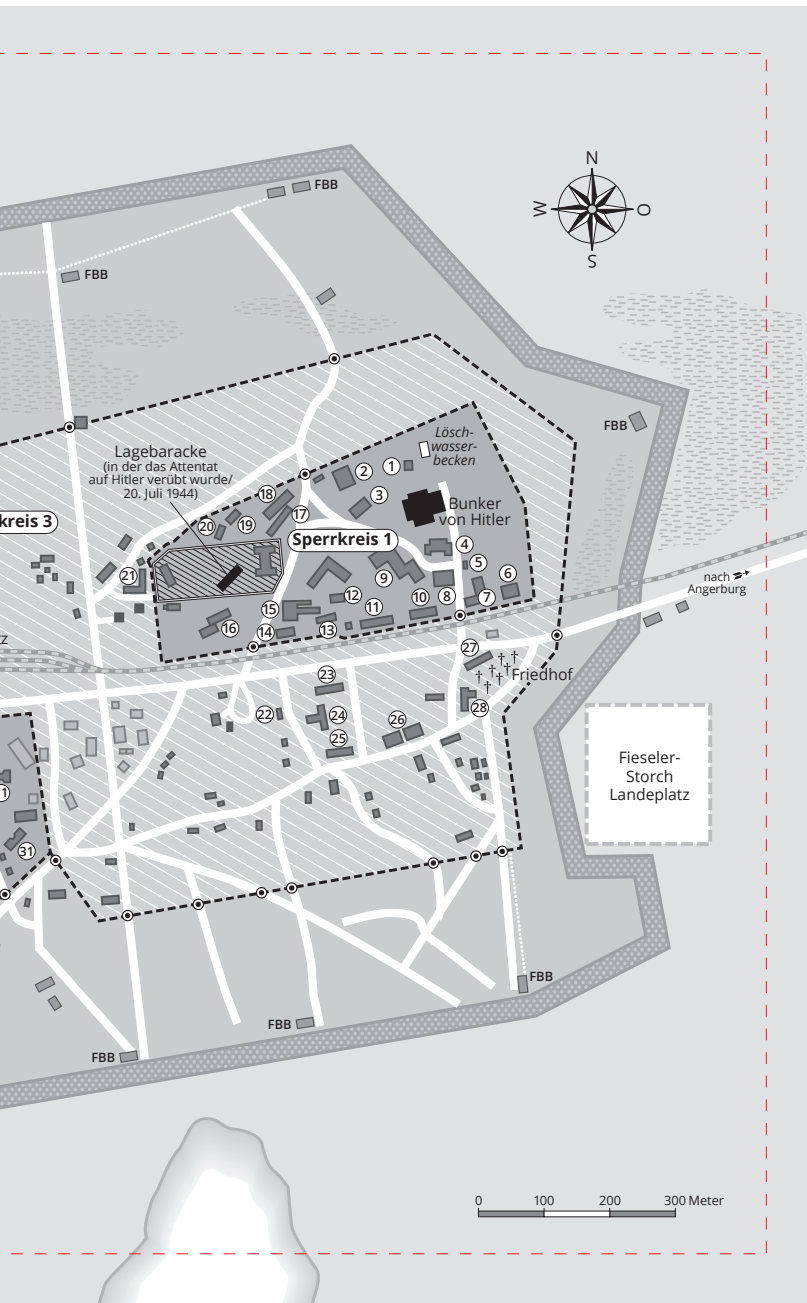
 Sondersperrkreis (Führersperrkreis)

FBB Führer-Begleit-Bataillon  
Sportplatz/Tennisplatz ???

Text bzw. welche Gebäude sollen benannt werden  
(siehe Nummern)

((Karte aufs Vorsatz?; Überschrift?))





# CONTENTS

## PROLOGUE

*Concrete Colossi 13 – Daily Life 23*

## I CHIEF COMMAND CENTRE

*A Forest on the Edge of the City – Construction – Arrival*

## II HITLER

*Christmas – Charisma – Leadership Methods*

## III ENTOURAGE

*The Birthday – The Historian – Vinnytsia – Acolytes – Discord*

## IV DAILY ROUTINE

*Isolation – Morning – Midday – Evening – Teatime*

## V HOLOCAUST

*The Rumour Mill – Himmler – Diplomats*

## VI ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT

*Detonation – Retribution*

## VII CHAOS

*Obsessed with Details – Confusion*

## VIII DESCENT

*Illness – Disinhibition – Departure*

## EPILOGUE

*Demining – Dynamics – Demystification*

*Endnotes*

*Literature*

*Image Credits*

*Acknowledgments*

*Name Index*



Fig. 1: Entrance to the Wolf's Lair "tourist attraction"

## PROLOGUE

### *Concrete Colossi*

A Friday in August. A dampness hangs in the air in the forest near the city that today is known as Kętrzyn but in Prussia went by Rastenburg, the smell of rotting wood melds with the scent of resin and wildflowers. Mosquitoes buzz past my ear, but otherwise, the only thing interrupting the silence is the twittering of birds. Two days earlier, I had travelled to the north-east of Poland, taking the train from Berlin Ostbahnhof to Poznań, where I arrived some two and a half hours later. From there, I travelled another three and a half hours on an intercity train, passing through Toruń and Iława, before arriving in Olsztyn, which as Allenstein was the capital of the administrative district of the same name in the province of East Prussia until 1945. After stopping there for the night, I continued my journey the next day in a rental car, driving an hour and a half eastwards along the seemingly endless avenues of Masuria, past remote villages and blinding blue lakes, until I reached my accommodation in the small town of Gierłoż (Görlitz, in German) on Lake Jezioro in the early evening.

My ultimate destination is the remains of the former *Führerhauptquartier Wolfsschanze*, commonly known as the “Wolf’s Lair”. In the 1940s, government officials, officers, and low-level service staff would travel to this place – where the various threads of the “Third Reich” converged, and where Hitler and his regime made most of the criminal decisions that would cause such terrible consequences right throughout Europe – on a special train that ran at least once a day and stopped directly at the complex, at the adjoining Görlitz railway station. The journey took approximately 13 hours.



It was here in the Wolf's Lair that the dictator spent the decisive years of his reign. It was from this location in the forests surrounding Rastenburg that the Nazi regime unleashed the full force of its destructive frenzy during the war. And yet, in the public memory of the Third Reich, the Wolf's Lair plays a secondary role; if people associate it with anything, it is with the failed assassination attempt by Claus Schenk Graf von Stauffenberg on 20 July 1944. For many people, the headquarters of the Reich in East Prussia remain a kind of black box. This is partly a result of the events that directly

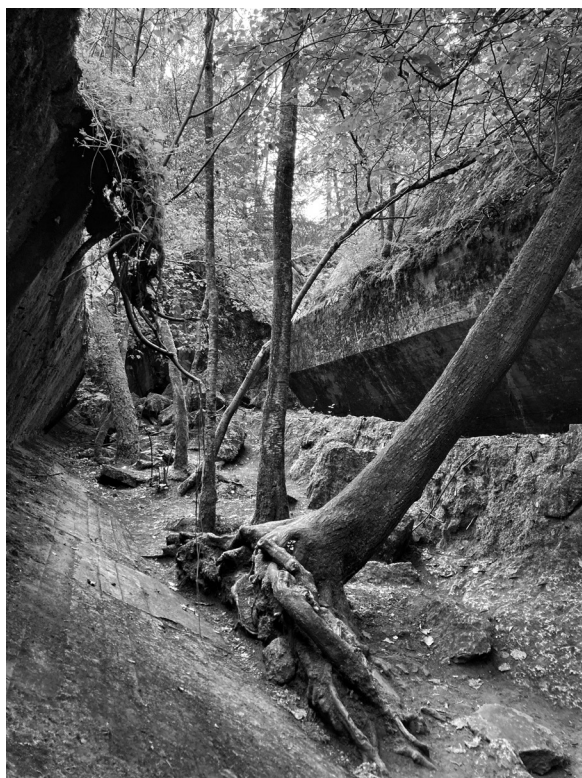


Fig. 2: Surreal landscapes with demolished bunkers on the current site of the Wolf's Lair

followed the end of the Second World War. In 1945, the southern part of East Prussia was placed under Polish control and the German population, which formed a majority at the time, was expelled. The Polish administration renamed Rastenburg Kętrzyn, after a Polish nationalist historian. Initially, the name Rastembork was chosen – but it would seem that a decision was made to erase the memory of all things German. New residents were settled there. They came from eastern Poland, which became part of the Soviet Union after the Allies shifted the country to the west. Shrouded behind the Iron Curtain, for decades after the war, the former Führer headquarters in Masuria, now in northern Poland, led a shadowy existence. It was difficult to reach, at least for the West German population. In contrast, those interested in the Nazi era – whether for academic or nostalgic reasons – were able to visit Obersalzberg in Bavaria, where Hitler's imposing residence was located, from 1945 onwards. The Berghof occupies a clear place in the collective memory. The same applies to the so-called *Führerbunker* on Wilhelmstrasse in Berlin, where the dictator spent his final days. Numerous books, newspaper articles, and films bear witness to this. The collective memory of the Wolf's Lair pales in comparison.

Yet Hitler spent more time in this wooded area about eight kilometres east of Rastenburg than in any other place during the Second World War: over 800 days between 1941 and 1944. During that same period, he was in Berlin only sporadically. The dictator spent a little under 400 days at the Berghof during the six years of the war. It was from the Wolf's Lair that Hitler oversaw his war of annihilation against the Soviet Union and the troop movements on the other fronts in Europe and Africa. It was at this location that he and his entourage decided on the mass murder of European Jews and pressed ahead with the genocide. It was here that he fell into a state of depression after the defeat at Stalingrad, where he dragged Germany and the world into the abyss. It was here that his end began.<sup>1</sup>

Initially, the Führer's headquarters in East Prussia was one of almost twenty command centres of this

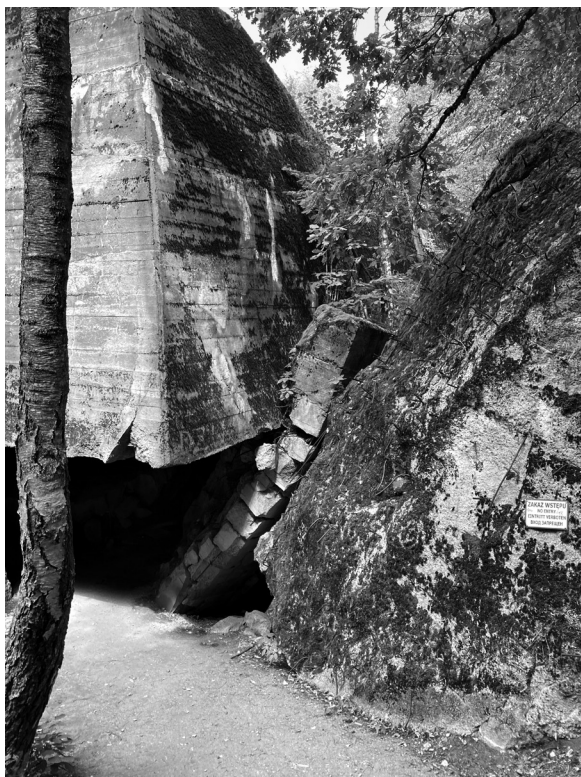


Fig. 3: Massive clumps of concrete and stone

kind. After the invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, it became the chief military command centre and a microcosm of National Socialism. Through the *Deutsche Wochenschau* – the news-reel series released by the regime, which filmed numerous state visits and medal ceremonies on site – the story of Hitler’s outpost on the eastern front reached the most far-flung corners of the Reich, whether it was in the Rhineland, Bavaria, or Württemberg. Over time, the Wolf’s Lair became a source of identification for the Nazi regime and the “racial community” of the Reich in what was framed as a final showdown with “Jewish Bolshevism” and the *Untermenschen* of the Soviet Union, which was to secure additional *Lebensraum* in the east.<sup>2</sup>

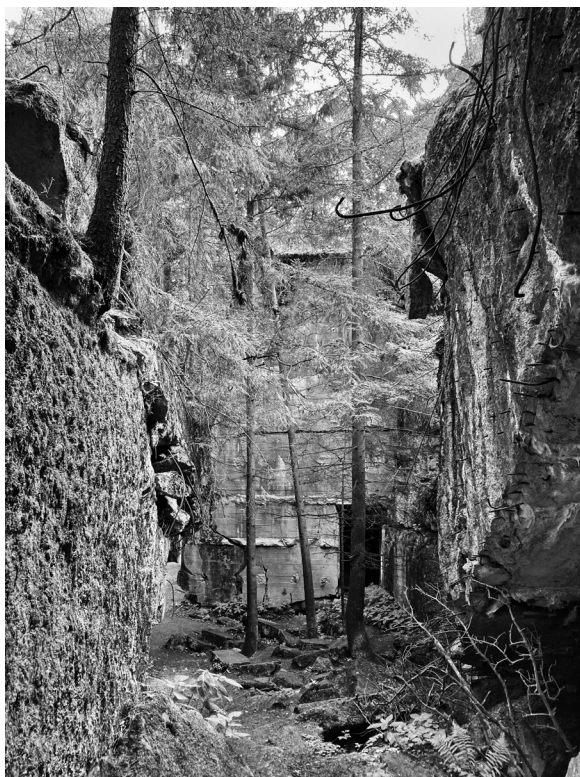


Fig. 4: Entrance to the bunker complex

My accommodation by Lake Jezioro is situated several hundred metres outside of what was once the Wolf's Lair, which was made up of an outer protection zone and three exclusion zones. After breakfast, I head off toward the site of the former headquarters. It spanned a total of around 800 hectares and was surrounded by anti-tank trenches, thousands of mines, and kilometres of barbed wire fencing. After 1945, the anti-tank trenches were filled in, the mines cleared, and the fences torn down. Today, the forest seems as peaceful as any other. The historical site can only be roughly identified with the help of a map of the complex. I walk for a while through the area of the outer protection zone, which at the time



was mainly home to anti-aircraft and machine gun positions. I am attacked by mosquitoes. After a while, as more and more concrete ruins emerge in the undergrowth along the side of the path, I realise must have arrived in what was Exclusion Zone II. Among other things, this area was home to six large residences for the Wehrmacht command staff, the headquarters of the commander of the Wolf's Lair, and a communications bunker, along with air-raid shelters for the staff.

The sandy forest paths on which I set out at Lake Jezioro have now turned into Prussian cobblestone roads. Approaching from the south, I eventually reach a road that still divides the site today. Exclusion Zone II was located to the south of the road, and Exclusion Zone I to the north. This road had connected Rastenburg and Angerburg (today Węgorzewo) before the construction of the Wolf's Lair, but it was impassable during the war. The Führer's headquarters were a restricted area. Today, the en-

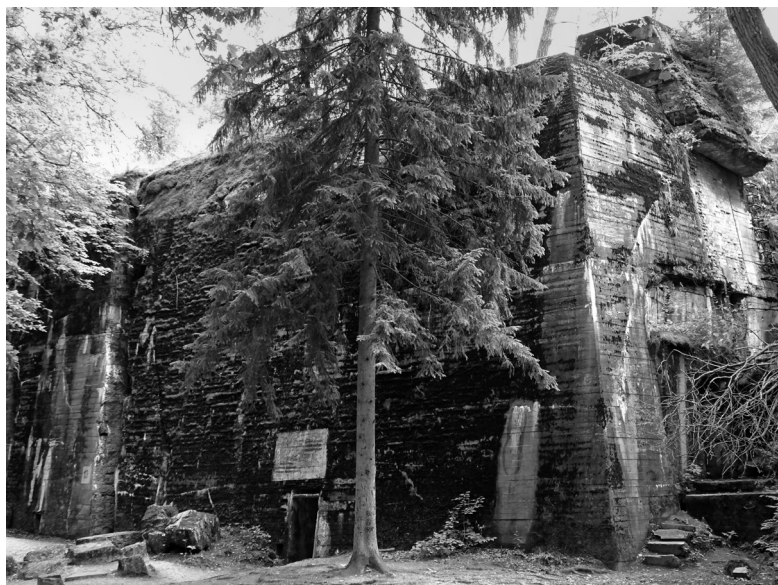


Fig. 5: The vestiges of Hitler's bunker

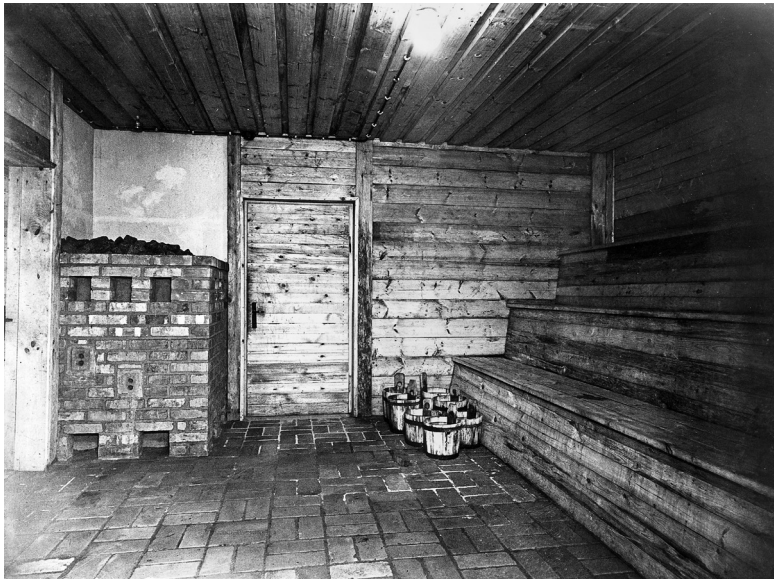


Fig. 6: Sauna for the residents of the complex

trance to the historic site and to Exclusion Zone I is located on this road. A large sign reads “Wilczy Szaniec”, Polish for Wolf’s Lair. I cross the road and walk past a ticket booth with a boom gate. Tour buses stop in front of it. Admission costs 20 złoty, or around 4.70 euro. The memorial site primarily consists of a circuit with explanatory panels. In one of the structures, there is a recreation of the interior of the conference room from 20 July 1944, with a bizarre-looking, life-size, puppet-like Hitler figure. Stauffenberg is rendered in a similar fashion. An imitation of his briefcase can be seen under the replica of the large, solid timber table. In another room, excavated artefacts from the Wolf’s Lair are displayed in vitrines, such as combs, beer steins with the SS insignia, and old Jägermeister bottles. A souvenir shop sells Wolf’s Lair mugs, tin teapots, and pocketknives. There is a campsite with barbecues. All in all, the scenery is more reminiscent of a forest campsite or a paintball facility than a memorial site. Tourists can drive around

the site in armoured cars from old military stock. Sometimes, history buffs in historical get-up re-enact events from the Second World War in the former Führer's headquarters. When this is happening, you might stumble upon men in Wehrmacht uniforms running around among the ruins of the bunker, shooting blanks and shouting "Achtung! Achtung!" or "Hände hoch!" (hands up!). On this particular day, I don't see any treasure hunters, who according to press reports sometimes dig for Nazi gold supposedly buried on the site. In February 2024, during excavations carried out on the site of the former accommodation of Hermann Göring, local researchers and amateur archaeologists discovered the skeletons of a total of five people, including that of a newborn baby. Polish prosecutors initially opened an investigation, but closed it a few months later. After so many decades, the cause of death could no longer be determined. It remained unclear whether the bodies had been buried in the Wolf's Lair before 1945 or perhaps in the years that followed.<sup>3</sup>

Around 350,000 people visit this bizarre place in the wilderness of Masuria every year, mostly tourists who spend their holidays in the nearby lake district. "Until 1955, nobody was able to enter the Wolf's Lair because of the danger posed by mines," says Jadwiga Korowaj. A historian by trade, she is waiting for me at the entrance; I have booked a guided tour with her. She was born in Kętrzyn, is in her mid-sixties, has blonde hair and is holding a yellow folder containing historical plans and pictures of the Wolf's Lair on transparent sheets. Korowaj has been guiding visitors through the site for almost three decades. She knows every nook and cranny of the Wolf's Lair. On our tour of what was Exclusion Zone I, she repeatedly positions herself at the locations depicted in the historical photographs on her transparent sheets, and then I see Hitler in the photo walking along the forest path where I am standing at this very moment.<sup>4</sup>

Korowaj leads me through a cratered landscape punctuated by the ruins of bunkers blown up by a platoon of German engineers at

the beginning of 1945. They protrude several metres from the forest floor like colossi. To this day, these masses of concrete provide a monumental impression of the violence of the Nazi regime, which systematically murdered more than six million Jews at the hands of its countless henchmen. The war unleashed by Nazi Germany cost the lives of over 60 million people. The brutality of these jagged bunkers stands in an unreal contrast to the idyllic forest, offset by the green of the plants and old trees whose roots are consuming the concrete. The tour begins with the remains of the barracks where Hitler received his briefings, and where Stauffenberg carried out his assassination attempt. This is followed by the rubble of the remains of the guest bunker, the stenographer's barracks, and the stone skeleton of a large stockroom. As we walk over the few remaining floor tiles of the former tea house near the Führer's bunker, Korowaj explains: "There were ninety buildings in the Wolf's Lair, including almost fifty reinforced concrete bunkers, some with walls seven metres thick," she says. While the largest bunkers resembled giant, sealed-off sarcophagi, some of the other shrapnel-proof concrete buildings and barracks also had windows. "All of the windows were facing north." The dictator had sensitive eyes, Korowaj continued, and avoided sunlight. Korowaj climbs into the ruins of Hitler's bunker and asks me to follow her. She shows me the one remaining gas-proof airlock and the vestiges of telephone cables protruding from the concrete in the entrance area. "Hitler had a photo of his mother, who died in 1907, hanging on the wall of his room," she says, standing inside the roofless ruin.<sup>5</sup>

The remains of Hitler's bunker feel oppressive. The grey concrete blocks, each several metres thick, lie crumpled atop one another like sheets of cardboard. Steel rebar sticks out of them like the tentacles of an octopus. Though this material, even as ruins, looks as if it will last for eternity, it was only ever intended to exist for a short time. The site was designed as a base for the army command during the war against the Soviet Union. From here, they would plan and oversee a rapid victory, after which the post would be



abandoned. But the campaign stagnated, the temporary inhabitants stayed, and the Wolf's Lair became the de facto headquarters of the "Third Reich".

In the secluded tranquillity of the forest near Rastenburg, the dictator was not confronted by the consequences of his orders until the very end. He lost touch with reality, became detached from the everyday experience of the war and the problems of the German people living in the Reich. "The geographical isolation, the almost hermetic isolation from the outside world, is likely to have intensified Hitler's increasing loose grasp on reality," says British historian and Hitler biographer Ian Kershaw about the Wolf's Lair. Albert Speer, the Nazi armaments minister who made frequent visits to the exclusion zone, summarised the situation later with the following words: "What Hitler's decisions meant on the front, where people fought and died, did not move us in the numbed world of the headquarters." In the second half of 1944, the historian and writer Felix Hartlaub, a member of the Wehrmacht high command's war diary unit based in Exclusion Zone II, wrote: "Not a single round of live ammunition has been fired here, not a single bomb has fallen, this strange sense of being sheltered from everything here can sometimes feel a little eerie." It was like living under a bell jar, he wrote. The personal suffering of the people on the outside is immaterial to those working in the Wolf's Lair. "Nowhere is the end of the war as far away as here". In the hermetically sealed environment of the headquarters, Hitler's unchanging entourage of complicit functionaries and yes-men, was in no small part responsible for the fact that even the dictator's most blatant military blunders went unchallenged.<sup>6</sup>

The longer the Russian campaign lasted, the larger the headquarters near Rastenburg became. By 1944, over several construction phases, additional buildings had been erected for accommodation, commercial, and other purposes, including the teahouse, a café, a sauna, and a brewery. In the spring of 1943, Hitler was shown a film about the V2 "wonder weapon" for the first time in the site's

custom-built cinema. The many amenities alone make it seem absurd that the Wolf's Lair was described as a "mixture of a monastery and a concentration camp", as General Alfred Jodl, Chief of the Operations Staff of the Wehrmacht, would later put it. Around two thousand people, including at least twenty women, lived and worked in the exclusion zones: including military personnel of all ranks and members of the Nazi police force, secretaries and caretakers, Hitler's valets, and radio operators. There were also chefs who had previously worked in Berlin's most exclusive hotels and masseurs who had worked in salons on Kurfürstendamm.

Camouflage nets prevented reconnaissance flights from taking images of the site. Even today, you can still find olive green shreds of plastic around the site, remnants of these nets. Paul Schmidt, the chief interpreter of the Reich's Foreign Office at the time, later described the grey and green bunkers as "primordial monsters" squatting in the forest. "They always felt cramped in some way. The dampness exuded by the blocks of concrete, the constant artificial light and the endless whirring of the ventilation systems heightened the unreality of the environment in which an increasingly pale and bloated Hitler received his foreign visitors. The whole thing had the air of the den of some legendary, evil spirit." Hitler's entourage was forced to become accustomed to the alien environment in the Wolf's Lair, stresses Kershaw: "His secretaries found life there exhausting in many ways. The military leaders spent much of their time preparing for and attending the increasingly nerve-wracking briefings." At the same time, for Hitler's most ambitious acolytes, regular access to the dictator was key to increasing their personal power.<sup>7</sup>

The living conditions in the Wolf's Lair were anything but ordinary. Hitler's personal staff complained of an anxious atmosphere. They were terrified of making mistakes, were burdened with an often crushing workload, and received too little free time. Hartlaub wrote of the "particular pressures of the main quarters", which for him triggered headaches and insomnia during his time there. The

sense of claustrophobia grew as the war dragged on. Hitler barricaded himself in his bunker with increasing frequency. According to Ian Kershaw, this self-imposed seclusion probably exacerbated his radicalisation. Even Hitler's contemporaries recognised that the East Prussian headquarters had a decisive influence on the dictator. Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels summarised the situation thus in 1943: "He no longer gets any fresh air, no longer finds any source of relaxation, sits in his bunker, making decisions and brooding. If only he could be moved to a different environment!" Hitler was taking cover, just as he had learnt to do as a soldier in the trench warfare of the First World War. The more precarious the military situation became, the thicker the bunker walls became. Towards the end of the war, the entrenchment in the forest of Rastenburg came to reflect Hitler's murderous front-line tactics of holding out at all costs.<sup>8</sup>

After leaving the ruins of the Führer's bunker, I make my way to the bunker opposite, that of Hitler's secretary Martin Bormann, and from there to Göring's accommodation, and then on to the exit. I say goodbye to my guide and leave the complex behind me like a bygone era. The French philosopher Paul Virilio aptly described the concept of the bunker as "the last theatrical gesture in the end game of Occidental military history". Virilio studied the "bunker altars" of the "Atlantic Wall" built by the Nazis on the French coast. The buildings conveyed to him "an inner and outer feeling of annihilation". The same can be said of the Wolf's Lair. And Virilio's notion of "Nazi claustrophobia", which he considered central to Germany's military catastrophe. According to Virilio, the Second World War was a war of communication in which radar images and new localisation and telecommunication systems were decisive. In contrast, Hitler's defensive doctrine, which relied on holding up in bunkers, consisted primarily of "the lithosphere, the soil, the blood". Despite the German aerial and submarine war, despite the use of early ballistic missiles, the stratosphere and hydrosphere ultimately remained alien to the Nazi regime. The German defeat

was in part a result of “the philosophy of a commander-in-chief who was bound to the soil, to the surface, it was the result of a weapons production policy that privileged ground forces at the expense of air and naval forces”.<sup>9</sup>

After the battle of Stalingrad was lost in February 1943, Hitler avoided social contact outside of his briefings. He became taciturn, slept little, and suspected betrayal at every turn. His left hand began to tremble, then his left leg, and he suffered from stomach cramps. According to his valet Heinz Linge, he fanatically insisted that “we will see this battle through to the death”. In autumn 1943, he collapsed for the first time in the Wolf’s Lair. His personal physician Theo Morell had been administering him stimulants and hormones for years. Hitler consumed excessive amounts of sleeping pills and cola tablets, was given digestive supplements and flu medication – and appeared to many to be a physical wreck. A few months after the assassination attempt of 20 July 1944, Hitler developed jaundice. He was treated with a cocaine solution and lost consciousness for a period of time. Squadrons of allied bombers were now flying over the headquarters on a daily basis. The “Führer” and his entourage were constantly anticipating an attack. The Soviet army was closing in. On 20 November 1944, an employee noted: “Wolf’s Lair is being abandoned. Everyone in Berlin!”<sup>10</sup>

### *Daily Life*

This book provides a glimpse behind the walls of the Wolf’s Lair. It does not give a detailed account of the Second World War and does not claim to rewrite the history of the conflict, even though many details from life within the Wolf’s Lair might be revealed here for the first time. With this book, I would like to create a new perspective on this topic by changing the vantage point – from the outside to the inside. To achieve this, I have relied not only on the extensive research literature and published and unpublished ar-

chival material, but even more so on the accounts of those who worked in the Wolf's Lair. Many of them gave accounts of their experiences after the conclusion of the war, such as Field Marshal Erich von Manstein, Hitler's personal chief adjutant Julius Schaub, or the aforementioned Heinz Linge, Hitler's head personal servant. Nazi press chief Otto Dietrich and historian Felix Hartlaub also documented their observations while stationed in the Wolf's Lair. Hartlaub was also a writer with literary ambitions. His notes from the exclusion zone are expressly not to be understood as factual reports, but as literary sketches in which he processed his experiences in the headquarters. I have also consulted the memoirs of secretaries Christa Schroeder and Traudl Jung, among other first-hand accounts.

It is worth keeping in mind that the writings of these eyewitnesses constitute personal memories of the actual events. In some instances, the people who gave accounts of their time in the Wolf's Lair glossed over some of the darker sides of events there. They relativised the crimes in which they were directly or indirectly involved. Instead of critically interrogating their role, they painted themselves as victims. Some, such as the Nazi administrative lawyer Henry Picker or valet Linge, remained fascinated by their "boss", Hitler, even long after the war was over. Colonel Nicolaus von Below, personal air force adjutant to the "Führer" from 1937 to 1945, described his experiences in his memoirs, published in 1980, in a markedly sober tone. However, at numerous points in his writings, his admiration for the dictator shines through. He did not articulate a critical stance on the mass shootings of Jews on the Eastern Front or the implementation of the "Final Solution". Instead, in keeping with Nazi propaganda, he continued to blame Poland for the start of the Second World War and criticised the "aerial terror" of the Allies. Hartlaub, on the other hand, viewed the events in the Wolf's Lair with a detached eye, even in the contemporaneous accounts he penned from within the complex. Others only distanced themselves from the Nazi regime after the war, such as the radio operator Alfons Schulz.

It is important to critically interrogate the ideological biases of eyewitness testimonies from within the Wolf's Lair. At the same time, though, through their immediacy and emotionality, these texts offer unique insights into the everyday world of the Führer's headquarters. The same applies to Hitler's "Table Talk" and "Monologues", which were produced without the dictator's knowledge at the behest of the head of the NSDAP party office, Bormann. They were published in West Germany by the former stenographers Heinrich Heim, a member of the SS, and Henry Picker. According to more recent analysis of the source material, these two men filtered the accounts, in some cases retrospectively, and also edited the language. Nevertheless, biographers of Hitler continue to rely on these accounts. And it would be foolish not to do so. Some of the transcripts produced by Heim and Picker on the basis of their contemporaneous notes were immediately forwarded by Bormann to Hitler's ministers while the war was still underway, and these ministers then quoted from them verbatim. The documents can at least be regarded as an approximation of what Hitler said. In the following, when citing these sources, I will make reference to the stenographer who was responsible for producing them.<sup>11</sup>

The eyewitness accounts that have survived paint a picture of a dangerous dictator who nevertheless succeeded time and again in entrancing his interlocutors – and of a man who millions of Germans continued to view as a quasi-religious saviour right to the very end. At the same time, these documents recount the activities of Hitler's inner circle, including Wehrmacht officers and major Nazi figures such as Bormann and Speer, who also took up quarters in the Wolf's Lair. The story they tell creates connections between everyday life as it was experienced in the Wolf's Lair and the military history and major events of the Second World War. These include "Operation Barbarossa", Germany's racial war in the East, and the genocide perpetrated on the Jews of Europe. The years in the Wolf's Lair not only represent the darkest period in the Nazi's campaign of destruction and extermination, they also contained some of the decisive turning points in Hitler's rule.

When the dictator and his entourage moved into the bunkers and barracks in the forest near Rastenburg in June 1941 following the victory over France the previous year, Hitler's standing was higher than ever. The following two years were a time of apparent normality, in which the regime suffered a series of military setbacks, but in which the war still did not appear to be definitively lost. It was the defeat at Stalingrad in 1943 that marked the decisive turning point on the Eastern Front. And in the wake of the Stauffenberg assassination attempt in 1944, the Nazi regime truly sank into chaos. When Hitler hastily fled from the Wolf's Lair in November of that same year, the Red Army had already reached German soil, and the roads of East Prussia were full of refugees fleeing westward. Total military defeat was imminent. In April 1945, the "Führer" and his long-serving entourage left the Wolf's Lair to meet their end in the bunker beneath the Reich Chancellery in Berlin.

This book recounts the story before the downfall. How did it come to be that from this isolated bunker city, an ever-more fanatical "Führer" ended up commanding countless suicide missions of unimaginable proportions? How was the mass murder of the Jews organised and implemented from the Wolf's Lair? Who were the lackeys and yes-men surrounding and supporting Hitler? What was their impression of him as a leader? What personal qualities did Hitler have – and how and to what ends did he use them? What routines and rituals of power determined the everyday life of the influential figures in the inner circle and the servants? These are some of the questions to which I try to find answers in the following.

The book is made up of eight chapters, which are organised in part chronologically, and in part thematically. Chapter I ("Chief Command Centre") is an introduction to the topography of the complex. Here, I recount the prehistory and the construction of the Wolf's Lair, describe the arrival of the dictator and the first military crisis in late 1941, when the Wehrmacht was forced to retreat from Moscow. In Chapter II ("Hitler"), I look at Hitler's actions

within the exclusion zone. The time frame is largely the first winter in the Wolf's Lair, in 1941/42, although in this section I also make some general observations about the dictator's personality and his leadership methods. In Chapter III ("Entourage"), I introduce selected protagonists from Hitler's inner circle, including his personal physician Morell, who supplied the dictator with pills and injections on a daily basis, his secretary Schroeder, a staunch National Socialist, and the critically minded war diarist Hartlaub. The chapter runs roughly from the "Führer's" birthday on 20 April 1942 to the final failure of what was known as "Case Blue", referring to the summer offensive against the Soviet Union in November of the same year. These months also saw the relocation and months-long stay of the residents of the Wolf's Lair at the "Werewolf" headquarters near Vinnytsia in Ukraine. Another subsection is devoted to Hitler's relationship with his generals – and the momentous rift that occurred on 7 September 1942. In Chapter IV ("Daily routine"), I focus on the experience of daily life inside the complex. I describe a kind of idealised daily routine in the knowledge that there were regular deviations from the schedule. Chronologically, the chapter begins with the encirclement of the 6th Army of the Wehrmacht near Stalingrad in late November 1942 and ends in the spring of 1944. Chapter V ("Holocaust") has a thematic focus. In this section, I reconstruct the processes behind the decisions made in the Wolf's Lair that determined the course of the Shoah. I describe how the words and deeds of the upper echelons of the Nazi regime became increasingly radical over the course of tea parties and strolls in the woods, leading to the decision to commit Germany's great crime against humanity. Chapter VI ("Assassination Attempt") begins with the landing of the Allies on 6 June 1944 and describes the plotting to resist Hitler and Stauffenberg's assassination attempt. Chapter VII ("Chaos") begins in the weeks after the assassination attempt, but has a largely thematic focus. In this section, I explain Hitler's counterproductive methods of conducting the war and of running government, as well as the often aimless actions of the



Nazi regime. The decisions made by the dictator in the Wolf's Lair were often not written down and were only passed on verbally. The ministers who received these missives in Berlin via a kind of game of telephone were then tasked with interpreting the "Führer's will", which was then supposed to inform new legislation or guide their actions as members of the government. This meant that confusion was inevitable. In Chapter VIII ("Descent"), I conclude by describing the months before the hasty departure from the forest near Rastenburg.

The description of the sometimes trivial events at the complex does not, it must be said, provide an image of the "banality of evil" (Hannah Arendt). Rather, in this context, it is the banal that seems evil. It is only at first glance that the dictator's morning training sessions with his German shepherd Blondi, the secretaries' afternoon leisure activities by the lake, or the guards' boozy evenings seem to be at odds with the waves of extermination and destruction in the German death camps and on the front lines. Daily life in the Wolf's Lair only *appears* to reveal to the irresolvable contradictions of the Nazi regime. However, we need to view the regime's terror together with its more trivial aspects. Paradoxically, the Nazis' tyranny found its precise expression in the calm, ritualised daily routines of the Wolf's Lair. Hitler felt that Nazi ideology gave him complete authority to carry out his racially motivated mass murder and war of extermination. The Wolf's Lair was the cosmos in which ideas were turned into the deeds that brought death to millions of people.

## II HITLER

### *Christmas*

In 1941, at Christmas time, Hitler received a visit from the League of German Girls at the Wolf's Lair. The girls had come to the Führer's headquarters to collect donations for the so-called Winter Relief Organisation of the German People for needy "members of the German race". The visit was accompanied by a high-profile media campaign. "I was one of the chosen ones that year," recalled a former group leader in a written account decades later. "I was picked up from my home. We were taken to the location in a closed train carriage without windows." When she arrived at the Wolf's Lair, she had to wait outside for some time with her group leader and a handful of Hitler Youth. "Finally – it was quite cold – he arrived". The group leader greeted Hitler with the words: "My Führer, your youth wishes you a Merry Christmas'. He replied: 'Thank you, children' – and shook our hands. [...] Then he invited us to dinner, saying we must have been frozen stiff, and then he left," said the former member of the league. "They served cauliflower and other things, but mostly vegetables – I found it quite modest. And then we were taken home again."<sup>12</sup>

Since the Nazis took power in 1933, their propaganda machine had used Christmas to present Hitler as the saviour of the "racial community", a figure sent by god. He was depicted on postcards in front of a glowing Christmas tree. Swastika-shaped cookie cutters were produced and distributed. Though parts of the Nazi elite wanted to replace Christian traditions with the supposedly ancient Germanic Yule festivities – with the German mother being venerated instead of Mary and Hitler taking Jesus's place as the Messiah – the leading ideologues never managed to supplant traditional

Christmas rituals. Hitler's secretary Christa Schroeder reported that Hitler actually thoroughly enjoyed Christmas: "Hitler always took great pleasure in giving presents to people he liked and to whom he felt close. On birthdays and especially at Christmas, Hitler always made sure to pick out gifts for them. These circles included not only Hitler's closest colleagues and employees and their wives or the artists he admired, but also acquaintances and friends from his military service during the previous war." According to Schroeder, the dictator was particularly fond of giving presents to women he admired, such as the director Leni Riefenstahl. "Every year at Christmas, these women would receive a gift, be it in the form of a particularly attractive *bonbonnière*, a bottle of perfume or, later in the war, a few pounds of coffee beans."<sup>13</sup>



Fig. 12: Wehrmacht soldiers celebrate Christmas at the Wolf's Lair, 1941

During the war against the Soviet Union, the joyful mood of Christmas time had completely evaporated. Between 1941 and 1944, Hitler spent the festive season at the Wolf's Lair on three occasions.

His closest employees, including his secretaries and his cook, were required to remain with him. They described the evenings as joyless; there were no Christmas decorations such as candles or fir branches. For other employees in the exclusion zone, such as the intelligence officers stationed there, social activities were sometimes organised in the officers' mess on Christmas Eve. When Alfons Schulz, a Catholic intelligence analyst, asked the ranking officer at one such event for leave so that he could attend mass at the church in Rastenburg, he shouted across the room: "We've got a lunatic here who still believes in the Baby Jesus, and wants time off to go to church! Are there any more idiots like that here?" Schulz later recalled.

Head of the NSDAP party chancellery Martin Bormann asked the "Führer" several times to ban the singing of Christian carols in Exclusion Zone I, reported the stenographer Picker: "Each time, Hitler replied that Bormann needed to make a clear distinction between his (Hitler's) stance towards today's church leadership and his attitude towards the cultural heritage handed down by the churches. He (Hitler) would under no circumstances want to have to miss out on hearing a Christmas carol like 'Silent Night' on Christmas Eve, saying it was one of the most beautiful religious songs in the world." Christian traditions were otherwise anathema to Hitler, and he felt even more strongly about its institution and representatives. "The war will come to an end. And we shall see that the last great task of our time will be to resolve the problem of the church. Only then will the German nation be completely secure," he said, according to the transcripts taken at the table in the teahouse in mid-December 1941. "It was not until the sixth, seventh, and eighth centuries that Christianity was forced upon our peoples by the princes, who were in league with the priests. Before that, they lived without this religion. I have six SS divisions that are completely detached from the church and yet they die with the greatest sense of peace in their souls. [...] Christianity is the most deranged thing that a human brain has ever produced in its madness, a mockery of all that is divine."<sup>14</sup>

December 1941 brought new uncertainties for the Nazi regime. In the wake of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the USA had joined the war. On 5 December, the large-scale Soviet counter-offensive on the outskirts of Moscow had also begun – a turning point for the Wehrmacht. Their advance was halted, their air of invincibility disappeared, the blitzkrieg against the Soviet Union was now a definitive failure. The Wehrmacht soldiers lacked winter clothing, and their weaponry was likewise not fit for winter combat. Nevertheless, Hitler ordered his troops to hold their positions on the eastern front by offering “fanatical resistance”, with no regard for the fact that “the enemy that had broken through their lines from the flank and the rear”. The dictator held his military responsible for the failure on the approach to Moscow. On 19 December, he dismissed Field Marshal von Brauchitsch and took direct command of the army himself. He was thus head of state and commander-in-chief in one. At least 200,000 German soldiers had already lost their lives on the Eastern Front, many had frozen to death in temperatures as low as minus 40 degrees, and 620,000 men had been wounded.

The winter of 1941 was exceptionally cold. In a radio address on 20 December, Goebbels demanded that the “members of the German race” hand over “warm woollen clothes, socks, stockings, vests, jackets, and jumpers, and warm, underwear, singlets and long johns, particularly if made of wool” for the troops fighting in Russia. At the Wolf’s Lair, Reich Minister Todt presented newly produced portable ovens for the front on 21 December 1941. That same day, Hitler wrote a public appeal from the main bunker: “If the German people wish to give their soldiers a present for Christmas, then they should do without all the warmest items of clothing they have at their disposal that they can do without during the war.” From then on, the sight of snow caused the dictator physical discomfort. Masses of snow piled up at the edge of the cleared paths within the exclusion zone. Hitler said to his confidant Bormann: “You know I’ve been an enemy of snow all my life, I’ve always hated it. Now I know why! I sensed what was to come!”<sup>15</sup>

In East Prussia as well, temperatures dropped to 34 degrees below zero in the winter of 1941. While public life in the Reich largely came to a standstill over the Christmas holidays, the Wehrmacht was caught up in heavy defensive battles on the Eastern Front. Field Marshal Keitel described the 1941 festivities at the Führer's headquarters as a "dreary Christmas". He organised some modest festivities for the non-commissioned officers and men of the Wehrmacht in Exclusion Zone II in the mess hall of the guards regiment. A number of officers also took part. In a speech, he commemorated "those struggling on the front lines and their loved ones back home". As he later recalled: "There was a deep shadow of sorrow cast on everyone's face as we reverently and plaintively sang 'Silent Night'".<sup>16</sup>

## V HOLOCAUST

### *The Rumour Mill*

There are only a handful of direct references to the genocide of European Jews in contemporaneous sources from the Wolf's Lair and later first-hand accounts. On the matter of how Hitler's entourage dealt with the "Final Solution", his secretary Schroeder wrote in a brief, undated shorthand note, which was probably made after the war and was then included in her memoirs published in 1985: "Typical: he [Hitler] simply does not want to be personally connected with certain things. [...] He issued orders to Himmler in private about the Jewish matter, but demanded that his name never be mentioned in this connection, an order that was strictly adhered to." As can be surmised from the surrounding context in her memoirs, Schroeder used the term "Jewish matter" to refer to the mass murder of Europe's Jews, which Himmler was instrumental in organising.<sup>17</sup>

According to the most recent research findings, around six million Jews fell victim to Germany's great crime against humanity, the Shoah, along with large numbers of other groups, including Roma and Sinti populations, who were killed on the basis of the Nazis' pseudoscientific and racist theories. Two million people were murdered in massacres within territories under German control, especially during "Operation Barbarossa". Around four million of them died in concentration and extermination camps such as Auschwitz.

Just a few days after Hitler's move to the Wolf's Lair in June 1941, German troops began hunting down local Jewish populations, such as in the nearby city of Białystok. The police battalion 309 murdered up to 2,200 Jews, 700 to 800 of whom were locked in the

city's synagogue and burned alive. The commanders of the SS and security police *Einsatzgruppen* sent detailed reports and figures on their massacres to addressees in the military, the government, the Nazi Party, and various offices of the Reich Security Main Office in Berlin. "Reports on the *Einsatzgruppen* in the East are to be presented to the Führer from here," stated the SS Gruppenführer and head of the Gestapo, Heinrich Müller, on 1 August 1941. It is likely that the reports were presented to the dictator in the main bunker of the Wolf's Lair, but we know nothing about how he reacted to them. However, in a conversation with Nazi ideologue and Reich Minister for the Occupied Eastern Territories, Alfred Rosenberg, Hitler praised the SS divisions, stating that they "knew what needed to be done".

With this comment, the dictator was also referring to the German invaders of Kiev, who, after occupying the city on 19 September 1941 were responsible for the awful climax of the "Holocaust by bullets" (Patrick Desbois). The mass murders of Jews, communists, and Sinti and Roma that took place behind the Eastern Front have also come to be referred to as the "forgotten Holocaust" because, in the shadow of Auschwitz, they are still not sufficiently present in the collective memory. On 28 September 1941, the Nazi occupiers in Kiev called on the local Jewish population to gather the next day near a goods station on the outskirts of the city, instructing them to bring warm clothing, their identity papers, and valuables. Anyone who did not obey the order, they were told, would be shot immediately. They were led to believe they would be resettled. Some of them took their pets with them. The execution site had been picked out in advance: Babyn Jar, a ravine some 2.5 kilometres long and 30 metres deep, which was under the guard of Wehrmacht units and Ukrainian militias. People were made to leave their suitcases on a hill above the ravine and told to remove their clothes. They were shot at the bottom of the ravine, and the next wave of victims were made to lie down on top of those who had already been murdered, with the executions lasting for more than two



days. "Some people died thinking of others, like the mother of the beautiful fifteen-year-old Sara, who asked to be shot together with her daughter," recalled Dina Pronicheva, a survivor of the massacre. "In this instance, up to the last moment, she had another thought in mind: if she saw her daughter being shot, she wouldn't see her being raped." After the massacre, the security police reported to the Chief Security Office of the Reich that precisely 33,771 men, women and children had been shot.<sup>18</sup>

In contrast to the mass murder of people with physical, mental and psychological disabilities carried out as part of the "Aktion T4" campaign, no document has survived in which Hitler issued orders to commit the Holocaust. There was also no single "fundamental decision". Rather, according to historian Peter Longerich, there was an "unwritten order" that meant that the "Final Solution" hovered "between secrecy and promotion" in a way that is difficult to make sense of. Fellow historian Ulrich Herbert has written of Hitler's habit of "not giving explicit orders, instead making vague suggestions of radical actions, or describing such steps as 'inevitable'". What we can be sure of is that the dictator's henchmen would not have committed genocide without his explicit approval. "The order to exterminate the Jews comes from the highest levels," said the Governor General of the unannexed part of Poland, Hans Frank, to his staff in April 1942. Behind the scenes, Hitler fuelled the murderous developments, which grew increasingly radical against the backdrop of the war. The "Final Solution to the Jewish Question" was his pet project, driven primarily by his fanatical, murderous anti-Semitism. Ian Kershaw described the dictator as the "chief inspiration of a genocide the like of which the world had never known". However, Hitler biographer Joachim Fest writes that although the extermination of the Jews was the "overarching concern of his life", Hitler had very little to say about the details of the extermination of the Jews. One motive for this was Hitler's "general obsession with secrecy", as well as a "vestige of bourgeois morality". From the outset, the regime did everything it could to cover

up the killing machinery. SS head Himmler and his men invented a code language for the mass murder of the Jews, using terms such as “special treatment” or “natural reduction”.<sup>19</sup>

These obfuscatory semantics did not prevent the killings from becoming common knowledge in the Reich. Shortly after the invasion of Poland in 1939, information began circulating about the massacres of Polish citizens and Jews at the hands of the Wehrmacht and the SS. The same applied to the systematic mass murders in the Soviet Union that began to occur in the summer of 1941. The first deportations of Jewish Germans from the Reich could not have gone unnoticed by their “Aryan” neighbours. The majority of the “German race” signalled its approval or looked on with indifference. Only rarely was the “evacuation” of the Jewish population “accompanied by significant concern from a large sector of the populace”, as intelligence officers noted. Hitler was informed of these sporadic negative reactions from his location in at the Wolf’s Lair. Even the smallest expressions of solidarity sparked a reaction of aggressive incomprehension. He expressed his disgust to Bormann: “If there are a few citizens shedding tears today because Jews have to leave Germany, then it says a great deal about these creatures that make up the petty bourgeoisie.” Showing compassion for the deportees was, in his words, “highly inappropriate”.<sup>20</sup>

It was in the Wolf’s Lair that Hitler made the key decisions on the genocide of the European Jews. However, his acolytes, generals, adjutants, and secretaries either did not mention the Shoah at all in their later recollections on their time at the Wolf’s Lair, or they explicitly indicated that they had only learned of the “Final Solution” after 1945. Hitler’s oldest adjutant Schaub, for example, did not even mention the persecution of the Jews in his written testimony. His valet Linge wrote in his memoirs that the mass extermination of the Jews remained hidden from him until 1945 – as was the case for “everyone in Hitler’s milieu”. He claimed to have only learnt about the gas chambers and the incinerators when he was being held by the Russians as a prisoner of war. In this connec-

tion, however, Linge also recalled many one-on-one conversations between Hitler and Himmler at the Wolf's Lair. In his retrospective opinion, it was the SS chief who bore the main responsibility for the Holocaust. Hitler's bodyguard Misch also claimed that he only learnt more about the concentration camps after his return from Russian captivity: "Hitler didn't say anything about concentration camps."<sup>21</sup>

The "Final Solution" was never a topic at the daily briefings in the Führer's bunker, stated Bernd Freiherr Freytag von Loringhoven, adjutant to the Chief of Army General Staff. The few surviving transcripts support his assertion. Jodl's adjutant Heinz Waizenegger, who was present at most of the meetings, also testified at the Nuremberg trials that "the mass murder of Jews and atrocities in the concentration camps were not discussed" in the map room. However, just like Linge, Waizenegger had also observed that Himmler and his Waffen-SS liaison officer at the Wolf's Lair, Hermann Fegelein, were "very often alone with the Führer to receive instructions". He presumed that the "Final Solution" had been discussed at these meetings. Otherwise, all of this had been "handled extraordinary secrecy at the Wolf's Lair". Von Loringhoven also stressed that he had had no idea about the murder of the Jews until the end of the war. He claimed that he was unfamiliar with names of the extermination camps. "We knew that the Jews had been mistreated in Germany since 1933, but we didn't know that this was part of an endeavour to systematically exterminate them. I knew nothing about the existence of SS *Einsatzgruppen* that killed Jews and other ethnic groups behind the front lines."

Were the mass murders really never discussed in these meetings, the contents of which were transcribed in such detail? The memoirs of German foreign office diplomat Franz von Sonnleithner, published posthumously in 1989, contradict this. He recounted an incident in 1944 when press officer Dietrich entered the briefing room with a report from an English newspaper that the "Russians had seized control of a German concentration camp called

Majdanek". There were "undoubtedly people there who would have been exterminated", said Sonnleithner. One of the pictures accompanying the article showed a very large number of well-organised combs. Another showed cells and incinerators. "The text stated that people had been exterminated here." Hitler dismissed the report with the phrase: "These are the severed hands of Belgian children during the First World War, nothing but enemy propaganda!" The dictator was referring to the tales of atrocity that the Entente powers – France, Great Britain, and the USA – had circulated about the troops of the German Empire in order to defame them. These included the legend that German soldiers had cut off the hands of Belgian children in order to cook and eat them. Sonnleithner believed the "Führer", or wanted to believe him, perhaps. By the time the German extermination camp in Majdanek was liberated by the Red Army in July 1944, 78,000 people perished there. Sonnleithner attributed his supposed ignorance to the high level of secrecy that had surrounded the "Final Solution". Even years after the war, in a private conversation, Hitler's SS adjutant Günsche had described the extermination of the Jews to Sonnleithner "as impossible". Evidently, members of Hitler's entourage were still repressing or denying Germany's great crime against humanity well into the postwar era, long after the historical facts had been established.<sup>22</sup>

Back in the days of the Wolf's Lair, through his clandestine behaviour, the dictator had at least given his people the option of acting ignorant or actively looking the other way. Certainly, the retrospective statements made by Hitler's entourage about the "Final Solution" were for the most part purely exculpatory. The murderous actions of German soldiers and the SS in the so-called Eastern Campaign and the deportations of Jews to Eastern Europe were also a topic of discussion within the ranks of the Wehrmacht. And those stationed within the Wolf's Lair generally had much better access to information than people back in the Reich and those in active combat. The rest was probably passed on via the rumour

mill. There is some evidence for this, such as Hartlaub's notes from Vinnitsa, cited above, in which he refers to the mass murder of the local Jewish population. Luftwaffe officer and adjutant to Hitler Nicolaus von Below conceded in his memoirs that there had been hints as to the existence and nature of the "Final Solution" at the Wolf's Lair, "such as Hitler's anti-Semitic outbursts, which grew increasingly frequent as the war drew on, or casual remarks made by senior figures in the SS", but that he had only come to interpret them after the war. Hitler often made no secret of his genocidal fantasies at his table talks. Looking back, von Below felt certain "that the extermination of the Jews was the result of an explicit order from Hitler, as it is inconceivable that Himmler and Göring would have undertaken such a thing without his knowledge".

Some decades later, radio operator Alfons Schulz recalled one morning in May, most likely in 1944, when a colleague of his came back to the barracks "from his night shift as pale as a ghost ... He vomited several times and we thought he was seriously ill." The man reported that he had overheard a conversation between Himmler and Bormann the night before. "In this conversation," reported Schulz, "the Reichsführer SS told Reichsleiter Bormann that he had 'pleasing news from Auschwitz' for the Führer". "Once again," he reported, "just as planned, 20,000 Jews had been 'liquidated' at the facility – 'ah, evacuated' – he quickly corrected himself." Bormann then "snapped at Himmler angrily and pointed out with a hiss that as had been agreed, such reports were only to be sent to him personally, in writing, by couriers dispatched by SS officers, in order to then be forwarded to the Führer. He fiercely forbade any further notifications on this subject by other means." According to Schulz, this was the first time he had heard of the mass murders. "In the interests of safety, however, we only divulged information about this overheard conversation to our closest confidants."<sup>23</sup>

In his memoirs, Hitler's valet Linge stated that his "blind faith" in the dictator at the time had prevented him from perceiving these "grave events" at the Wolf's Lair. After the war, he repeatedly

heard the claim that Hitler could not have known everything about the “Final Solution”. “That’s utter nonsense,” summarised Linge. “I wasn’t present when Hitler and Himmler talked about these things – nobody was – but I know from personal observations and remarks Hitler made to me that he knew everything.” Linge reported that he had often been present when Hitler had said with a trembling voice and sparkling eyes “that he would ruthlessly eliminate anyone who stood in his way at any time”. During the final weeks of his life, the dictator revealed to Linge that “he had taken the first step in extirpating Judaism, from which humanity needed to be ‘liberated’.”

The involvement of lower-ranking figures in the Holocaust was also a topic of discussion within the exclusion zone, at least in broad strokes. Large numbers of Wehrmacht soldiers and SS guards passed through the compound, especially low-ranking servicemen. These men brought information about the murders on the front and in the camps back to the forests of Görlitz. Behind closed doors and under the cover of the dense forest, relaxed conversations emerged among the perpetrators of these unspeakable crimes. Evidence of this can be found in the private diary kept at the time by Marianne Feuersenger, secretary of the Wehrmacht High Command’s War Diary Office. In the summer of 1944, she noted that an adjutant had approached her out of nowhere and told her about the “most terrible experience”: “He’d had no idea about anything at the time, was ordered to search the flats of Jews in Berlin. But the real objective was to arrest them. He said it was terrible. They burst into the apartments and found dead bodies. Poisoned or hanged, from chandeliers or window frames. The most horrible experience of his life! The things that people can no longer hold in now that things are going downhill!” These reports bear witness to the distortion of moral parameters under the Nazi dictatorship, in which an accomplice to murder was accorded more sympathy than their victims.<sup>24</sup>

## VII CHAOS

### *Obsessed with Details*

In the wake of the assassination attempt, though the *Deutsche Wochenschau* newsreels and the government-controlled newspapers continued to present Hitler as an immortal messiah who could not even be harmed by a bomb attack, in reality, the “Führer” had already withdrawn from the public sphere in 1944. In the parallel world of his secluded headquarters, contact with the outside world was almost completely severed. Hitler fanatically tried in vain to regain the upper hand in the war, moved ghost armies around on his maps in his briefing room, made up of units that had already been obliterated, and planned counterattacks that never materialised due to a lack of men and material. He was just as uninterested in the soldiers who lost their lives and the suffering on the front lines as he was in the everyday plight of the “German race” back in the Reich, many of whom were left inhabiting a landscape of smouldering ruins. He rarely gave speeches, preferring instead to record radio addresses. Long gone were the days when he had flown around Germany and made hundreds of appearances in front of tens of thousands of supporters in the Reich; when he had posed for photos with the soldiers during visits to the troops and eaten bowls of soup from rudimentary field kitchens. “Nobody, whether on the front lines or back at home, could be sure that they wouldn’t suddenly find themselves standing in front of Hitler somewhere,” commented valet Linge nostalgically about the dictator’s seeming omnipresence during those years.

Even events occurring in the immediate vicinity of the complex and in nearby Rastenburg seemed to be taking place in another universe. “The shrinking of the fronts and the dwindling of the cit-

ies under German control has essentially no effect on us here,” said historian Hartlaub, describing the unreal feeling of the situation. To the very last, the Nazi regime nurtured hopes in the V1 and V2 *Vergeltungswaffen* (retaliatory weapons). Hitler was wont to talk about them at his daily meetings with high-ranking officers. Missile pioneer Wernher von Braun had unveiled his invention for the first time at a top-secret presentation and film screening in the cinema at the Wolf’s Lair. Like a little boy, Hitler repeatedly burst into enthusiastic rounds of applause. In the end, however, even the ballistic missiles could not prevent defeat. The dictator’s hopes faded. At a conference on the Nazi education of soldiers at the Wolf’s Lair, Hitler painted “a bleak picture of the future” to his field marshals and generals, as his personal physician Morell noted. According to Luftwaffe adjutant von Below, Hitler stated: “Ultimately, if I were ever to be abandoned as supreme leader, I should expect to be surrounded by the entire officer corps. They would huddle around me with swords drawn, just as every field marshal, every colonel general, every commanding general, every divisional general and every regimental commander must expect his subordinates to stand by him at the critical moment.” Field Marshal von Manstein then cried out: “And so it shall be, my Führer.” Manstein and other generals had been trying for some time to persuade Hitler to relinquish supreme command of the Wehrmacht, or at least to hand over the decisions on the Eastern Front to a leading military officer. The dictator refused until the very end.<sup>25</sup>

One of the main criticisms levelled posthumously at the dictator was that his management of the war was chaotic. He changed commanders at the drop of a hat, was suspicious of everyone, and got caught up in minor details. This compulsive behaviour began with the battlefield maps. Hitler was obsessed with even the smallest elements. For this reason (and because of his poor eyesight), for his briefings at the Wolf’s Lair, he requested that operations departments of his general staff produce massive maps at scales of up to 1:100,000 (1 kilometre = 1 centimetre). The standard scale was



1:300,000 (1 kilometre = 0.33 centimetres). According to Adjutant von Loringhoven, for specific sections of the battlefield, Hitler even requested maps at a scale of 1:5000 (1 kilometre = 20 centimetres) during the final months of the war. On these enormous maps, the colour-coded rivers, mountain ranges, front lines, formations, and troop numbers were particularly easy to make out. "This required a tremendous amount of extra work and meant that the telephone lines of the high commands were often completely blocked due to efforts to obtain the information necessary to produce such maps, information that in and of itself was scarcely relevant", wrote von Loringhoven later. He also recalled that the supreme commander interfered in the most minor tactical decisions on a daily basis. "Hitler issued orders for troop deployments, offensives, and movements right down to the level of the battalion and the company. These orders had to be communicated immediately to the command centres that were to carry them out. This style of leadership led to great dissatisfaction among the troop commanders on the bases, but it was on the front lines that the unfortunate soldiers ultimately paid the price for it." Some of Hitler's instructions were issued on the spot during his briefings. Speer wrote that Hitler engaged in the most shortsighted "practice of tinkering around the edges". The increasingly paranoid atmosphere in the Wolf's Lair intensified Hitler's manic need for control and his mistrust of his generals. The "greatest military leader of all time" was now taking even the smallest military decisions into his own hands.<sup>26</sup>

In his postwar recollections, von Manstein likewise described how, over the course of the war, Hitler "increasingly sought to intervene in the leadership of the subordinate command centres by issuing orders to individual officers". Yet one of the particular strengths of the "German military leadership was that leaders of all ranks were expected to assume responsibility, take the initiative, and make independent decisions, and these qualities were fostered wherever possible". Von Manstein pushed back against the tendency to dismiss Hitler disparagingly as a mere "lance corporal from

the First World War". He had an astonishing knowledge of war technology and operational possibilities, claimed von Manstein. However, he lacked a sense of the limits of feasibility. For Hitler, the power of the will was more important than that of the intellect. He had not placed his faith in the "art of war" but in pure force, according to the attempts by high-ranking officers looking back on the disaster to later distance themselves from their "Führer". According to von Manstein, it was almost impossible to persuade Hitler to "give up a position on the battlefield, no matter how untenable". Von Loringhoven also confirmed that, in the end, Hitler was only interested in the Wehrmacht holding "fortresses" and "strongholds" with "fanatical resistance" during their retreat. Decades later, the adjutant could still hear the dictator's voice "emphasising the word '*fan-natical*'". Von Manstein lamented the fact that the commander-in-chief had tenaciously defended his principle of "holding on at all costs". The resulting discussions became tortuous. Chief of the general staff Zeitzler, for example, often had to argue for days at the briefings to dissuade Hitler from his suicide missions.<sup>27</sup>

The general also criticised the way that the military command had been restructured so that everything went through Hitler. However, any individual was bound to be overwhelmed by the military decisions that had to be made on a daily basis. Consumed by his megalomania, Hitler did not consider this shortcoming: "What would you all do if I were no longer here," he said to his valet Linge. Journalist Sebastian Haffner summed up Hitler's attitude as follows: "It's me or chaos". Hitler biographer Fest's analysis of the situation was that "the principle of pitting different authorities against one another, of staging power struggles and intrigues, as [Hitler] done in recent years, now proved to be unsuited in the fight against a resolute opponent, and was one of the fatal weaknesses of the regime". The result was a state of "almost complete anarchy". However, the calm of the forests of Rastenburg remained largely immune to this chaos and anarchy. Holed up in his main bunker, Hitler was able to continue his path to ruin unimpeded.<sup>28</sup>

I have already discussed the fact that the Wehrmacht leadership bore a large portion of the blame for the military catastrophe suffered by their forces. Hitler's valet Linge bemoaned that after 1945, hardly a single general admitted that he had "made bad or misguided decisions and been at fault for the battles they had lost. It was not just the loss of the war, but also of the individual battles and skirmishes that were cast as being Hitler's fault". Speer also described Hitler in his memoirs as a small lance corporal who had "gained an inaccurate picture of the leadership process through his 'trench perspective'". Unlike von Manstein, however, he also pointed out that it had been quite convenient for the men at the Wolf's Lair to be relieved of the burden of responsibility – and of culpability – by receiving the final decision as an order from on high. Only rarely did I hear that one of these individuals had reported to the front in order to escape the permanent conflict of conscience to which they were exposed at the Führer's headquarters". Hitler's valet Linge wrote that many high-ranking officers had tended to regard Hitler "as a genius without whom things could not go on" – however absurd his orders may have been.

Right up to the end, the generals conferred absolute decision-making power to the dictator. Nevertheless, Hitler repeatedly suspected them of circumventing his orders. He sensed he was being betrayed, that his orders were being sabotaged behind his back. Sometimes he secretly sent filmmakers to the front to get what he felt would be an unfiltered impression of the situation on the ground. If one of the generals did contradict him at the meetings at the Wolf's Lair, Hitler would accuse them of being indecisive. His choleric outbursts continued to be effective in intimidating his opponents. He would punish them by refusing to make eye contact with them for days or weeks. This was a particularly effective measure inside the Wolf's Lair. In the barracks and bunkers of the closed complex of the exclusion zones, it was obvious to everyone if somebody had fallen out of favour with the dictator. This could lead to being socially ostracised by the other high-ranking officers.

It is hard to overestimate the conditioning effect and psychological dependency that this microcosm created among those present over such an extended period.<sup>29</sup>

As such, it was evidently simple enough for the dictator to keep the military leadership in his bunker kingdom compliant. Not only through psychological tricks such as systematically ignoring specific individuals, but also through effecting a confident demeanour. Despite all the setbacks – indeed perhaps because of them – the community gathered here clung to the conviction that Hitler was still in control of everything. High-ranking officers who came to the Wolf's Lair with the intention of describing the catastrophic situation on the Eastern Front to the commander-in-chief returned to their units “converted” to a sense of confidence, von Loringhoven later reported. The “Führer” promised them fresh troops and new equipment that did not even exist. His entourage remained in the Wolf's Lair, their stance characterised by a mixture of self-deception, fatalism, and pragmatism. The men from the inner circle in particular must have known that their future fate was inextricably linked to that of Hitler.<sup>30</sup>

In the briefings after the assassination attempt of 20 July, Hitler sometimes admitted that Germany was in a “terrible situation” militarily, as Marianne Feuersenger heard from an adjutant attending the conferences. However, the dictator immediately added: “but of course I'll give anyone who tells me that we can no longer win the war a ‘clip around the ears’.” He made those around him swear that they would fight on at all costs. The slogans of perseverance that could now be heard throughout Germany began in the Wolf's Lair. Hitler told his adjutant von Below: “We will not surrender, never. We may go down. But we will take a world with us.” The dictator and his regime did not admit their failure. Himmler blamed Russian spies and defecting German soldiers for the difficulties on the Eastern Front. He too seemed to be acting irrationally. It is difficult to find another explanation for the fact that he recommended that Hitler reintroduce a “medieval custom of the *Landsknechte*” to im-

prove communication between the German fighters on the front. The Wehrmacht soldiers were to use the “daily battlefield cry” to protect the unity of the army. According to Himmler, the battlefield cry was to consist of a call and response between soldiers and officers and was to be issued daily. Anyone who did not know the daily cry was to be shot on the spot, because they might have been infiltrated by the Soviets.

Hitler did not sign off on this bizarre proposal. In the summer of 1944, he was already planning a major offensive in the west, which would later become known as the Battle of the Bulge. He wanted to use it to push back the advancing US troops. Adjutant von Below asked him “why he was not concentrating all his forces against the Russians, and was told that he could attack the Russians at a later date, but that this would be impossible if the Americans had already made it to the centre of the Reich. He first needed to create a buffer on the western border.” Von Below could not understand this stance. “And I don’t think there was anyone in Germany at the time who could understand Hitler’s plan. At that time, we all thought: ‘let the Yankees march into the Reich first and keep the Russians as far away from the old German border as possible’.” When US troops broke through the German lines near Avranches in Normandy on 31 July 1944, Hitler quickly reinterpreted the devastating defeat as an “opportunity for a great German victory”, as Feuersenger learned from the briefing. Hitler had believed that “they could make a rapid armoured advance” and cut off the American wedge formation. Major General Scherff, who was in hospital after the Stauffenberg assassination attempt, commented on Hitler’s plan to Feuersenger with the words: “Of course that will never succeed! We don’t have the manpower! Besides, given the aerial superiority of the enemy, they will be able to smash any deployment from the flanks through concentrated effort.” Scherff would be proven right.<sup>31</sup>

## *Departure*

On a sunny autumn day on 20 November 1944, Hitler was woken at 11 a.m. After brief consultations with his chief adjutant Schaub, personal physician Morell, and with Keitel and Bormann, he returned to the briefing room at around 1:40 p.m. and had lunch for the last time at the Wolf's Lair. He was then taken with his entourage to the Wolf's Lair railway station and boarded his special train to Berlin. "We left the Wolf's Lair with the somewhat painful feeling of a final farewell," wrote his secretary Junge in her memoirs published in 2002. "I had loved life in the forest and had grown fond of the East Prussian countryside. Now we were leaving – for good. Hitler probably knew it too."<sup>32</sup>

By the time he left, the dictator was a mere shadow of his former self. There was nothing left of the celebrated general he had been when he arrived at the Führer's headquarters in the summer of 1941. He was extremely reluctant to leave the Wolf's Lair. The dictator had previously told Jodl that he would not be leaving East Prussia – that the war was lost. Ultimately, though, he was won over by the thought of returning to energetic activity of overseeing the war, and as his generals assured him, the "Adlershorst" headquarters in Hesse would be much better suited to the task of commanding the offensive being launched in the Ardennes. "The train was full. The rest of the general staff had departed an hour earlier," said Junge. "This time we travelled by day. Hitler wanted to arrive in Berlin after dark to keep his arrival a secret." The dictator sat in his darkened compartment. At 4:05 p.m., he gathered his entourage for tea in the buffet carriage. In the mahogany-panelled carriage there was a large rectangular table with red leather chairs, a record player, and a radio. Hitler could communicate with the outside world at any time via radio. Here, too, he had the staff draw the blinds and turned the lights on. "Outside, the sun was shining brightly, and here it was semi-darkness, like in a mausoleum," Junge recalled. In

addition to her and another secretary, Morell, Bormann, Hewel, and Schaub were present. Hitler's "voice barely rose above a whisper, his eyes remained downcast, staring absently at his plate or at a spot on the white tablecloth. An oppressive atmosphere weighed upon the cramped, shaky cage in which we were gathered, and we were all overcome by a feeling of foreboding."<sup>33</sup>

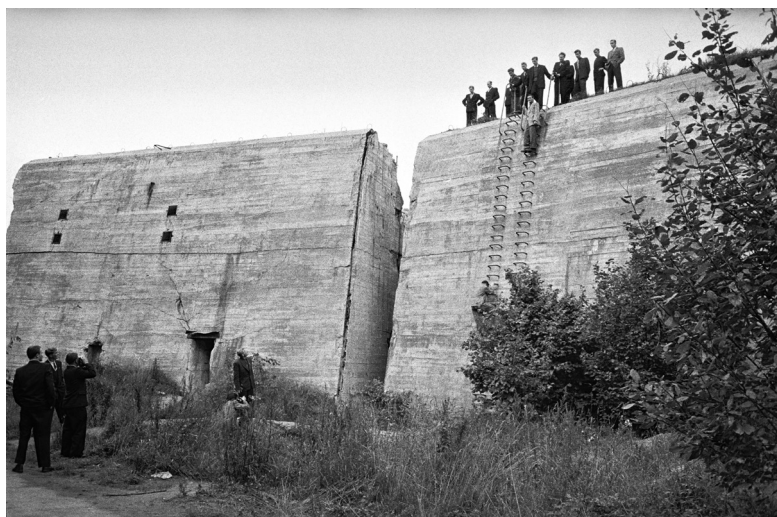


Fig. 22: Polish day-trippers inspect the Führer's bunker at the former Wolf's Lair, 1956

Construction work was still underway at the Wolf's Lair to reinforce the facility. Immediately after Hitler's departure, however, and under the strictest secrecy, some of the barracks and facilities were cleared out, anti-aircraft guns were dismantled, and "demolition calendars" were drawn up to schedule the destruction of the bunkers. Keitel gave the order "not to let the Wolf's Lair fall into the hands of the enemy undestroyed". The front line in the east remained relatively stable until the beginning of 1945, when a major offensive by the Red Army began. The Wehrmacht was scarcely able



to offer resistance. Beginning on 24 January, a German engineering platoon blew up Hitler's long-standing main command centre in the forests of Görlitz. The code name for the operation was "Insel-sprung". Some 1.6 tonnes of TNT were used for the main bunkers. The explosions were so powerful that large pieces of concrete flew up to 20 metres through the air. The blast caused hundreds of trees to snap like matchsticks. Huge craters were torn in the forest floor. The 1.5-metre-thick ice on the nearby Moysee lake was cracked. In Rastenburg, eight kilometres away, windowpanes shattered. The shops there were still open at the time. While Hitler and his entourage had already fled to safety, the inhabitants of the city had to remain in place. The Gauleitung gave them no warning. Most remained calm, others packed their things and fled through the frozen landscape at minus 15 degrees. When Soviet units approached, panic broke out.<sup>34</sup>

On 26 January, Red Army soldiers took Rastenburg. Around half of the population was still there. The soldiers set fire to the castle and the old town, forced their way into the houses, dragged people out onto the streets, beat and maltreated them. Members of the Nazi Party and officials were shot on the spot. Among the countless women raped after the Soviet invasion of East Prussia were Catholic nuns from the Congregation of the Sisters of the Blessed Virgin and Martyr Catherine, founded in 1571 in Braunsberg (now Braniewo), Warmia. The Red Army soldiers stormed the order's convents and hospitals in Rastenburg, Allenstein, and Heilsberg. Some of the nuns were shot on the spot, others had their head-dresses torn off and some were deported to Siberia by the Soviet army. A total of 102 nuns lost their lives.<sup>35</sup>

On 27 January 1945, the Red Army liberated Auschwitz. On the same day, Russian soldiers occupied the ruins of the Wolf's Lair without facing resistance. By this stage, the Ardennes Offensive had failed. In March, the Allies crossed the Rhine. The battle for Berlin began in mid-April. The inhabitants of the Wolf's Lair, the hundreds of men from the guard battalion, SS men, waiters, and



cooks, were sent to the front and scattered in every direction. Only Hitler's inner circle remained with him. The dictator and his men met their doom in the bunker beneath the Reich Chancellery. At around 3.30 p.m. on 30 April 1945, he and Eva Braun, whom he had wed just the previous day, took their own lives. His acolytes had tried until the very end to persuade him to flee Berlin. Hitler, however, had brusquely replied that he would not be going anywhere. He should never have left the Wolf's Lair, he said.<sup>36</sup>

## EPILOGUE

### *Demining*

Almost a year after the Red Army occupied the area, the process of completely demining the land surrounding the Wolf's Lair began. The Polish combat engineers deployed to carry out the task first had to determine the layout of the mines, as they had no German documents at their disposal. It took ten years to make the site completely accessible. The engineers cleared 55,000 mines and 200,000 pieces of ammunition. After the war, stones and material from the Wolf's Lair were used to rebuild Warsaw, which had been destroyed by the Wehrmacht. Three of these engineers were killed during the work, and three others were seriously injured. From a West German perspective, the former Führer headquarters at the Wolf's Lair now lay deep behind the Iron Curtain. In the wake of the Korean War, by the early 1950s, the fronts in the conflict between East and West had hardened. The communist People's Republic of Poland sealed itself off from the West. There were no diplomatic relations with the Federal Republic of Germany and its politicians were regarded as "Bonn revanchists". Meanwhile, Poland's relationship with the socialist "brother state" of the GDR was also characterised by mistrust. Millions of Poles had been violently killed by Germany's war of extermination and the reign of terror of its occupation. The country lay in ruins. The Allies' decision to shift Poland's borders westwards resulted in the resettlement of 1.7 million people from the Soviet-annexed east to the former eastern territories of Germany – including Rastenburg, which had by then been renamed Kętrzyn. Polish–German relations remained strained, even after the GDR recognised the Oder–Neisse border in 1950; in the Federal Republic of Germany, meanwhile, for a long

time, the ceded southern section of East Prussia was described as being “under Polish administration”.<sup>37</sup>

The memory of Stauffenberg’s assassination attempt on 20 July 1944, to this day the most famous event that took place at the Wolf’s Lair, was highly contested in both German states. In East Germany, official government propaganda portrayed the men and women of the resistance as “agents of US imperialism”, while in West Germany they were long denounced as “traitors” by large sections of the population, especially among the millions of ex-servicemen. In the early 1960s, a quarter of West Germans had a negative attitude towards them.<sup>38</sup>

After the mines were cleared, the Wolf’s Lair was opened to the public for the first time in 1959 and a memorial site was erected. Polish authorities then began building a tourist centre and a hotel with eighty beds. A few years later, the Polish government announced plans to create a museum featuring life-size wax replicas of Hitler and other prominent Nazis, but this never materialised. In 1973, the former headquarters near Kętrzyn was visited by more than 100,000 tourists, with the figure rising to 300,000 just three years later. We have no figures on visits by East German citizens, which probably went under the radar of public perception. In any case, there are virtually no East German press reports on the Wolf’s Lair. From the 1970s on, small numbers of visitors also came from West Germany. In 1975, Bonn and Warsaw established diplomatic relations for the first time as part of Willy Brandt’s *Ostpolitik*. At that time, admission to the Wolf’s Lair cost 3 złoty, or about 40 German pfennig. Polish guides showed the tourists through the remains of the bunkers and buildings. Since then, the shattered monumental ruins of the former main bunker have become the main attraction and a popular photo opportunity.<sup>39</sup>

After the fall of the Iron Curtain, a Polish-Austrian tourism operator called “Wolfsnest GmbH” leased the site. A new hotel with a restaurant and pub was built, as well as a souvenir shop. At one point, there were even plans to build a golf course in the area.

Kiosks sold ashtrays shaped like skulls and model kits of Hitler's bunker. The lack of a thorough, historical understanding of the site allowed the Wolf's Lair to become a hot attraction among right-wing extremists and visitors seeking a morbid thrill feeling for many years; the area was neglected, the bunker remains unsecured. According to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, this kind of "Nazi Disneyland" can also be explained in part by a certain lack of interest among the Poles in the site as a home to the perpetrators of Germany's crimes, combined with the effects of commercial interests in the structurally weak, tourism-reliant region of Mazury. Since 2015, the site has been managed by the local forestry authority. Nowadays, there is a circuit leading visitors around the site and information boards providing historical background, but on some days, it still has the feel of an amusement park.

For a long time, politicians and the general public in West Germany were largely indifferent to the topic of the Wolf's Lair. One reason for this was the widespread desire to make a clear break with the Nazi era, of which the ruined headquarters in former East Prussia were a stark symbol. Another motive was the ambivalent stance towards Stauffenberg's assassination attempt. The conspirators of the 20 July plot were only gradually accorded a positive historical interpretation. It was not until the 1980s that a critical stance toward the Nazi era really took hold among the German public. This decade also saw the first initiative to honour Stauffenberg at the site of the attack, as files from the Political Archive of the German Federal Foreign Office show. On 11 October 1983, Philipp Freiherr von Boeselager, one of the last survivors of the 20 July conspirators, wrote to Alois Mertes (from the conservative Christian Democrats), Minister of State at the Federal Foreign Office, asking him to consider "whether the Poles might be asked to install a plaque at the site of the assassination attempt in the old, destroyed Führer headquarters, which is visited by many Poles, to commemorate Stauffenberg's actions". The intention was to remind visitors that "the Nazis were not the only kind of Germans".

The Federal Foreign Office then instructed the German embassy in Warsaw to “suggest to the Polish communist government that a memorial plaque for the failed assassination attempt of 20 July be erected at the former ‘Führer’s Headquarters’”. Their Polish counterparts, however, rejected the request. Deputy Foreign Minister Ernest Kucza argued that the German resistance movement had believed “that it would have to maintain the General Governorate had the assassination attempt been successful”. It took almost another ten years before a plaque commemorating Stauffenberg was installed at the Wolf’s Lair in 1992. On the anniversary of the assassination in 1994, Bundestag President Rita Süßmuth (CDU) was the first German politician to pay an official visit to the forest near Kętrzyn and lay a wreath – 49 years after the end of the war.<sup>40</sup>

Apart from its significance with respect to the memory of Stauffenberg’s assassination attempt, the former headquarters in East Prussia still plays a rather subordinate role in Germany’s remembrance of the Nazi era. This can only partly be explained by the fact that, from a West German perspective, the site was essentially obscured by the Cold War until 1989. Even in the three decades since the fall of the Iron Curtain, little has changed with respect to the amnesia surrounding the Wolf’s Lair. For many Germans, the area near Kętrzyn is still a hermetically sealed site. At the same time, the myth of the Wolf’s Lair still exists today – as a symbol of hiding away from the world in a bunker. The term has haunted the West German since 1945. When West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt had a hermetically sealed situation room set up in his official residence in 1976 due to the threat posed by the Red Army Faction, the CDU opposition tried to make political capital by comparing his situation with Hitler in Wolf’s Lair (“The Russian campaign demonstrated clearly that battalions cannot be successfully led from this kind of headquarters”). During a deployment of German blue helmets in Somalia between 1993 and 1994, the well-secured liaison office of the Bundeswehr in Mogadishu was internally nicknamed the “Wolf’s Lair”. And as late as 1998, when

the decommissioned underground bunker of the Bonn Federal Government on the Ahr river was put up for sale, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* dubbed it the “Federal Republic of Germany’s Wolf’s Lair”.<sup>41</sup>

This uncritical use of the term is an indication of a lack of reflection among Germans on the history of the site. The role of the East Prussian headquarters as a central site of decision-making for the Nazis’ reign of terror during the Second World War has largely remained underexplored. Given this lack of social awareness, it is hardly surprising that the Wolf’s Lair has been able to retain a mythical status in neo-Nazi circles since the war – with the name of the headquarters coming to function as a kind of code. In February 1990, for example, police officers unearthed the neo-Nazi group “Wehrsportgruppe Wolfsschanze” in Berching, Bavaria. While in the summer of 2004, authorities discovered a basement at a former industrial site in Berlin-Schöneweide where the right-wing extremist group “Berliner Alternative Süd-Ost” had set up a clubhouse called the “Wolfsschanze”, replete with swastikas and SS runes on the bar and walls.<sup>42</sup>

### *Dynamics*

The social dynamics in the claustrophobic atmosphere of the Führer’s headquarters were an important prerequisite for the radicalisation of Hitler’s dictatorship during the Second World War. In recent years, the interaction between architecture, place, and social relationships has increasingly been used as a lens through which to interpret historical events. Space is thus a fundamental component of the exploration of reality and a stage for historical events, a vessel for domination and power, and a sphere of a habituated form of practice.<sup>43</sup>

Both points of reference can be applied to the Wolf’s Lair. The continuity of the people present at the Wolf’s Lair and the firmly ritualised daily routine in the social space there formed the frame-

work for the criminal orders Hitler issued. Several times a day, the dictator gathered the military leadership around him for briefings. Without the expertise of these men, he would not have been able to wage the war. The generals carried out Hitler's murderous orders until the very end and largely complied with his military decisions – even if their prospects of success grew increasingly minute. This was partly due to their subservient mentality as soldiers, and partly due to Hitler's initial military successes and his resulting status as the “greatest general of all time”. In addition to this, just like the dictator, they believed they were fighting a historic and decisive battle against Bolshevism, which they hoped to defeat from their outpost in East Prussia. The leading military figures also expected their obedience to bring them professional and economic benefits. Even major Nazi figures such as Ribbentrop or Göring, who had hardly any official duties at the Wolf's Lair, used their presence there to maintain power or perks within the system of the dictatorship. However, the daily proximity to the “Führer” – who styled himself in Exclusion Zone I as “Germany's saviour” – also helped to fuel the compliance of those present. And the generals were not immune to this. Like a network of communicating vessels, they amplified the dictator's conception of himself. As such, for a long time, they participated in the propagandistic myth of the “first soldier of the Reich” and his closest and most loyal followers, who were fighting for the German people on the front lines, both propagating this myth and at the same time falling under its spell. They had great difficulty in freeing themselves from this spectre.

Hitler also controlled his high-ranking officers through an unpredictable mixture of respect and a choleric insistence on always being right. The generals went along with him out of fear of falling out of favour or, even worse, having to leave the Wolf's Lair, which they viewed as epicentre of the “Third Reich”. Nowhere else in Germany in those years was power and space so closely intertwined as in the Wolf's Lair. The communal meals were regarded as an indicator of the current pecking order on site. They served as rit-



uals of domination and of paying homage to Hitler. The seating at the table was reflective of each person's position within the Wolf's Lair. Bormann and Keitel, for example, were always allowed to sit opposite the dictator. The further away you sat from him, the lower you were in the hierarchy. People of lower rank were forced to sit at a small table in the corner. It was revealing that after his dispute with the generals in autumn of 1942, the first thing the dictator did was abolish these communal meals. By removing the high-ranking generals from the room, he wanted to punish them for their supposed insubordination. In his eyes, they had forfeited the privileged moment of sharing a meal with him.

The spatial conditions at the headquarters near Rastenburg made it easier for Hitler to become increasingly detached from reality over the years. At the Wolf's Lair, he was able to hide away from the rest of the world. He was barricaded in behind by seven-metre-thick bunker walls, two-metre-high fences, and hundreds of armed guards. As his military demise advanced, he gradually stopped visiting the front and avoided public appearances. In Exclusion Zone I, he was surrounded exclusively by his personal staff, his closest acolytes, and leading figures and yes-men from the government, party, and military. It was in the exclusion zone that he initiated the first steps in the extermination of the Jews, which he saw as his historical mission and discussed with Himmler and other henchmen in secret meetings. The *Reichsführer-SS*, who himself visited extermination camps and witnessed mass executions, bemoaned his experiences in the course of carrying out the genocide: "It was the most terrible task and mission that an organisation could receive: the assignment to solve the Jewish question," he said in a speech to generals in 1944. Hitler, on the other hand, observed the course of Germany's great crime against humanity committed against the European Jews – behind which he was the driving force – with no apparent emotion or irritation, holed up in his isolated bunker.

He spent day after day in an artificial bunker world, with ar-

tificial lighting and filtered oxygen. He never saw the inside of a German extermination camp. He made his military decisions in the wood-panelled briefing room after looking at maps of the battlefields, which only presented an elegant, graphic illusion of the cruel reality of war. Obsessed with detail and control, Hitler meddled in tactical procedures. His deadly orders were transmitted in real time from the intelligence bunker to the troops on the front lines. At no time, however, did he have to witness the horror of the battlefields. The gulf between Hitler's artificial world in the Wolf's Lair and the reality on the front lines and in the Reich grew wider and wider. His lack of connection with the real conditions outside the walls of the complex resulted in countless ill-advised decisions. The outcome was chaos and bewilderment among those receiving orders. Ruling the Reich from the Wolf's Lair meant governing in a constant state of emergency. In the exclusion zones of the complex, there was a focus on military matters, with hardly any room in the heavily ritualised daily routine for civilian or domestic political issues. But Hitler's interest in these issues was limited in any case. He made arbitrary decisions without consulting his ministers. The location of the headquarters on the eastern edge of Germany made communication with the ministries in Berlin difficult. After the war, Nazi press chief Otto Dietrich summed up the situation with the following words: "in theory, Hitler had built an ideal, Führer-led state. But in practice, he had created utter Führer-led chaos."<sup>44</sup>

The architecture of the headquarters – living in this cramped space between these concrete giants – also had effects on the mental state and social interactions of the people living there. Those who, like Traudl Junge, seemed to feel largely at ease at the Wolf's Lair, were the exception to the rule. Most found the exclusion zones, with their barbed-wire perimeter fences and bunkers surrounded by dense forest, oppressive. Soldiers and SS men compensated for their monotonous shift work with evenings of heavy drinking. Individual perceptions, however, also depended on their particular role. Some felt overworked while others were plagued by boredom.

And then there were those who were aware that their position at the Wolf's Lair afforded them special privileges. Hartlaub's writings show that living within the complex, "under the bell jar", as the historian called it, made it easy to block out the reality behind the fences.

This is another reason why the Stauffenberg assassination attempt had such a devastating effect on Hitler and his entourage. The explosion of the bomb definitively tore apart the false sense of security that had reigned within the Wolf's Lair, disrupting years of quiet, conscientious isolation. As the Red Army approached in the autumn of 1944, the mood grew increasingly tense. A feeling of fatalism took hold. It would have been awfully interesting to interview Felix Hartlaub in detail after the war about his time in the Wolf's Lair. But he disappeared in early May 1945 and was never seen again. After leaving the Wolf's Lair with the rest of the troops, he continued to work for a few months at the Wehrmacht base in Zossen near Berlin, initially in the War Diary Office. In the final days of the war, he was called to the front near the capital. The 31-year-set off for the Spandau barracks. However, he never arrived. He was declared dead in 1955.

The members of Hitler's entourage had inextricably bound their lives to that of their Führer. The longer the war went on, the more they felt like they were all united by their common fate. While the cramped living situation inside the Wolf's Lair created an oppressive mood, the extended amounts of time spent together also fostered an intense sense of belonging and togetherness. This is the only explanation for the fact that Hitler's entourage stayed with him long after it had become clear that he was advancing inexorably toward his downfall. The adjutants, secretaries, and valets who awaited the end together in the bunker beneath the Reich Chancellery in Berlin had forged an unshakeable bond in the forests near Rastenburg; there seemed to be no alternative to the endlessly maintained routines of the war, which initially charged towards victory and was later left clinging to hopes of salvation. Without

an understanding of the nearly three and a half years they spent together in the Wolf's Lair, it would be virtually impossible to make sense of the self-destructive dynamics and fatalism of their shared downfall.

### *Demystification*

In his foreword to the 2008 book *Der letzte Zeuge* (The Final Witness) by Hitler's former bodyguard Rochus Misch, author Ralph Giordano divided the historical figure of Hitler into a "historically relevant" and a "historically irrelevant" personality. According to this division, there was the historically important dictator on the one hand, who terrorised Europe and the world, and the historically irrelevant Hitler on the other, the man was affable and fond of dogs, who snacked on baked goods during the day and sent his bodyguard Misch a handwritten congratulatory note on his wedding in 1942. As a Holocaust survivor, Giordano was perturbed by the simultaneous existence of the two Hitlers: "How many gas chamber deaths were recorded by Rudolf Höss, the commander of Auschwitz-Birkenau, on the day Hitler congratulated his bodyguard and his bride Gerda on their marriage?" asked Giordano. "How many men, women, and children were killed by the mobile death squads of *Einsatzgruppe* A, B, C, and D in all those different places behind and on the Eastern Front, all supposedly in the battle against the partisans, when Misch saw Hitler slumped in his study?" With these questions, Giordano highlights the seemingly paradoxical parallels between Hitler's trivial behaviours as a man and the singularity of Germany's great crime against humanity, which Giordano himself only narrowly survived.

However, the trivial nature of everyday life in the Wolf's Lair is in no way at odds with the millions of murders committed by the National Socialists. Rather, it reveals just how secure Hitler felt. How calmly the Nazi regime was able to plan its deeds and issue

its orders. And how confidently the dictator reckoned with the support of the majority of the German people, who, until the very end, so profoundly internalised Nazi ideology and its murderous, racialised anti-Semitism. As such, to depict the reality of life in the Führer's headquarters near Rastenburg is not to trivialise the Nazis' crimes. On the contrary, it shows how banal and murderous actions were able to occur right beside one another. Germany's great crime against humanity was present inside the Wolf's Lair. Hitler often spoke openly of his hatred of Jews at teatime. Decisive decisions affecting the course of the Shoah were made within the exclusion zone. This did not escape the attention of the entourage. Anybody who wanted to know was able to – something that applied not only to those in the Wolf's Lair but also those back in the rest of the Reich. The retrospective assertions of people who spent time at the Wolf's Lair that they knew nothing about the "Final Solution" were purely exculpatory.

To this day, the "historically irrelevant" Hitler – that is, the dictator who could at times appear charming and humorous in his personal interactions – continues to be a source of confusion. And it leads commentators to make inferences about the culture of remembrance regarding the Holocaust in Germany. Israeli historian Yuval Harari made the point in an interview in July 2023 that it is wrong to reduce fascism and Nazism entirely to some ultimate form of evil and to portray their protagonists as "the greatest monsters in human history". To do so obscures the appeal that the fascist worldview possessed – and still might pose – for so many people. In other words, if we view Hitler as merely a murderous monster, we cannot understand the attraction he exerted on millions of his followers. In order to demystify Hitler, it is necessary to view him in all his mundanity. The German people deified the "Führer" as a "saviour", but they also identified with him, saw him as the man to act on their own resentments. The dictator was the driving force behind the war of extermination in the East and the genocide of the European Jews. But without the consent of the majority of the

German people, he would not have been able to unleash his apocalyptic power. The same applies to the active support he received from his acolytes and from the military leadership, as is made clear by looking at the functioning of daily life in the microcosm of the Wolf's Lair.

But Hitler's depiction as the personification of evil is not some chance occurrence, it is also a product of the way Germany dealt with the aftermath of the Nazi era. The narrative of Hitler as a demonic mass murderer allowed West German society to shift the blame for the crimes of the Nazi era onto the dictator and the ruling elites. The image of the Wolf's Lair as a hermetically sealed location where the Nazi regime's inner circle gathered supported the narrative of the "criminal clique" around Hitler who bore sole responsibility for the Nazis' war of extermination and genocide. In June 1961, when asked whether they, as Germans, felt "in some way complicit in the extermination of the Jews", 88 per cent of German citizens responded that they "did not feel complicit". Leading politicians such as social-democratic chancellor Willy Brandt and federal president Gustav Heinemann also helped to fuel this kind of moral self-exculpation, by declaring that the German people were more or less passive victims of Hitler's rule: "We had to endure countless hours of darkness before we were relieved of the criminal tyranny of the National Socialists," said Heinemann on the anniversary of the end of the war in 1970, trumpeting this legend of passivity. This relativisation of historical responsibility went hand in hand with a desire to make a "clean break" with the Nazi past. As late as 1986, 66 per cent of German citizens were in favour of closing the book on the country's process of interrogating its past.<sup>45</sup>

One thing is certain: the former headquarters known as the Wolf's Lair should no longer be confined to the periphery of Germany's commemoration of the Nazi era but should be placed at the centre of the picture. But for this to be possible, a detailed historical and topographical study of the site would need to be carried out. A second welcome step would be the construction of a docu-

mentation centre outlining the history of the Wolf's Lair and the National Socialist reign of terror that emanated from it. The establishment of such a centre would be the responsibility of the Polish government. But the German government would need to propose the centre to its Polish counterparts and potentially also provide the necessary funding. In light of the ongoing differences between Poland and Germany regarding remembrance policy and the tensions this has caused, it seems unlikely that such a cross-border cooperation will take place any time soon.

For years, there have been disputes over German reparation payments for the crimes committed during the Second World War. Polish politicians of all political stripes agree that the recognition of German guilt should be backed up by compensation for the damage caused. However, Germany has thus far refused to give in to these requests, viewing the issue of reparations as having been long since resolved.<sup>46</sup>

There is another example that illustrates the ongoing lack of knowledge and understanding among Germans when it comes to their eastern neighbours: during the Warsaw Uprising mentioned earlier, which lasted from 1 August to 2 October 1944 and claimed almost 200,000 lives, German soldiers and SS members carried out horrific massacres on the local population. But in the collective German memory of the Second World War, this uprising is still largely unknown and is often confused with the 1943 uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto. Those responsible for the killings were never really brought to justice in West Germany. The directive to crush the uprising had come directly from the Wolf's Lair. Warsaw was to be razed to the ground "to show Europe what happens when people rise up against Germans", Hitler stated in his orders. On the site of the former headquarters, there is now a room dedicated exclusively to the Polish people's attempt to liberate themselves from the terror of German occupation. German tourists who enter this space often have no idea what it's all about.<sup>47</sup>



To this day, the majority of German citizens lack an understanding of the suffering endured by Poles during the Second World War. “The fact that the war of extermination carried out in Eastern Europe from September 1939 onwards was based not only on anti-Semitism but also on anti-Slavic ideas is something that is largely ignored in the collective memory of Germany’s crimes during the Second World War”, writes the historian of Eastern Europe Felix Ackermann. It was not until the summer of 2024 that the German government announced the intention to implement “measures to support the surviving victims of the German invasion and occupation between 1939 and 1945”. However, most members of that generation have long since passed away. Just as there was no financial aid, for decades, Germany had no site of remembrance for the millions of Poles who were murdered. It is only with recent plans for a German-Polish House that the idea of incorporating a memorial to the German occupation of Poland during the Second World War was floated, and there is to be an additional memorial to the Polish victims of the occupation.<sup>48</sup> In a similar fashion, perhaps the Wolf’s Lair could likewise come to function as a German-Polish site of remembrance. This would allow this symbol of repression – not just the repression on the part of the Nazi commanders stationed there regarding the consequences of their orders on and behind the front lines, but also, later, that of the West German public with respect to devastating destruction caused by German forces in neighbouring Poland – to perhaps become a site for raising awareness. At the very least, the fact that numerous chunks of concrete from the Wolf’s Lair were used for the reconstruction of Warsaw testifies to just how deeply intertwined the histories of these two countries are.

This could also counteract attempts by right-wing politicians to co-opt Stauffenberg’s failed assassination, who are trying to instrumentalise the act for their own political purposes. The Alternative für Deutschland agitator Marc Jongen wrote back in 2021 that the assassins of 20 July 1944 stood for the refusal of a “perpetuated

penitence". He criticised Germany's "guilt-centred culture of remembrance". Meanwhile, ethnonationalist AfD politician and EU parliamentarian Siegbert Droese paid his respects to another key figure from the Wolf's Lair when he visited the site in 2018. For a photo that later circulated online, he posed proudly in front of the ruins of the former Führer's bunker – his right hand placed firmly on his heart.<sup>49</sup>

At the end of his mission, Hitler and his *Volk* had left the continent in ruins. However, the stone giants in the forests of Görlitz, which bear witness to the madness and fanaticism of their time, are more than just historical relics. They continue to play a role in contemporary history wars and in the struggle for the future. It is high time that we shed some light on the events that took place here and on the mindset that prevailed behind its thick concrete walls.

## Endnotes

- 1 See Martin Kaule, *Wolfsschanze: "Führerhauptquartier" in Masuren*, Berlin 2014, pp. 4 & 41; Heike B. Görtemaker, *Hitlers Hofstaat, Der innere Kreis im Dritten Reich und danach*, Munich 2019; Volker Ullrich, *Adolf Hitler: Biographie; Die Jahre des Untergangs 1939–1945*, Frankfurt/Main 2018, pp. 484–499; Joachim Fest, *Der Untergang, Hitler und das Ende des Dritten Reichs: Eine historische Skizze*, Reinbek bei Hamburg 2003; *Downfall* (director: Oliver Hirschbiegel, 2004).
- 2 Christoph Raichle, *Hitler als Symbolpolitiker*, Stuttgart 2014, p. 432 f.
- 3 See Guido Kleinhubbert, "Forscher finden Skelette in Görings Haus", in: *Der Spiegel*, 29 April 2024, available online at {[www.spiegel.de/wissenschaft/wolfsschanze-forscher-finden-skelette-in-haus-von-hermann-goering-a-ddcc89d5-fa3b-456d-9b65-63b06907442d](http://www.spiegel.de/wissenschaft/wolfsschanze-forscher-finden-skelette-in-haus-von-hermann-goering-a-ddcc89d5-fa3b-456d-9b65-63b06907442d)}, last accessed 30 April 2024.
- 4 For visitor figures, see {<https://polenjournal.de/tourismus/6405-280-000-besucher-haben-heuer-die-wolfsschanze-besucht>}, last accessed 3 January 2024; "Das Ende von Nazi-Disneyland", in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 20 July 2024.
- 5 Hitler quote taken from: Christa Schroeder, *Er war mein Chef: Aus dem Nachlass der Sekretärin von Adolf Hitler*, Munich 1985, p. 114; Ian Kershaw, *Hitler 1936–1945* (Vol. 2), Munich 2000, pp. 566 & 570.
- 6 Felix Hartlaub, *Aufzeichnungen aus dem Führerhauptquartier*, Berlin 2022, pp. 71, 81, & 87; Albert Speer, *Erinnerungen*, Munich 2003, p. 316 f.; email from Ian Kershaw to the author dated 22 May 2024.
- 7 See Kaule, *Wolfsschanze*, p. 12; Hartlaub, *Aufzeichnungen*, p. 74; Peter Hoffmann, "Zu dem Attentat im Führerhauptquartier 'Wolfsschanze' am 20. Juli 1944", in: *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 12 (1964), pp. 254–284, here: p. 255; Alfons Schulz, *Drei Jahre im Führerhauptquartier*, Stein am Rhein 1997, p. 43; Paul Schmidt, *Statist auf diplomatischer Bühne 1923–45: Erlebnisse des Chefdolmetschers im Auswärtigen Amt mit den Staatsmännern Europas*, Bonn 1949, p. 312; email from Ian Kershaw to the author dated 22 May 2024.
- 8 Ibid.; Ralf Georg Reuth (ed.) *Goebbels: Tagebücher 1924–1945*, vol. 5: 1943–1945, Munich 1992, pp. 1903–1906 (entry from 2 March 1943).
- 9 Paul Virilio, *Bunker Archaeology*, Vienna 2011, pp. 52–56, here p. 52 f.

- 10 Joachim Fest, *Hitler*, pp. 944–954; Heinz Linge, *Bis zum Untergang: Als Chef des Persönlichen Dienstes bei Hitler*, Munich/Berlin 1980; Marianne Feuersenger, *Im Vorzimmer der Macht: Aufzeichnungen aus dem Wehrmachtführungsstab und Führerhauptquartier 194–1945*, Munich 1999, p. 243.
- 11 Werner Jochmann (ed.), *Adolf Hitler: Monologe im Führerhauptquartier 1941–1944, aufgezeichnet von Heinrich Heim*, Hamburg 1980; Henry Picker, *Hitlers Tischgespräche im Führerhauptquartier*, Berlin 1999; Mikael Nilsson, “Hitler redivivus: ‘Hitlers Tischgespräche’ und ‘Monologe im Führerhauptquartier’ – eine kritische Untersuchung”, in: *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 67 (2019), pp. 105–146.
- 12 “Schriftlicher Bericht einer ehemaligen Jungmädelführerin vom 14. April 1991”, in: Szykowski/Wünsche, *Führerhauptquartier*, p. 238 f.
- 13 Andrea Biernath, “Wie die Nazis Heiligabend umdeuteten”, in: *Der Tagesspiegel*, 15 December 2014, available online at {[www.tagesspiegel.de/gesellschaft/weihnachten-unterm-hakenkreuz-8123176.html](http://www.tagesspiegel.de/gesellschaft/weihnachten-unterm-hakenkreuz-8123176.html)}, last accessed 11 November 2024; Judith Breuer and Rita Breuer, *Von wegen Heilige Nacht: Das Weihnachtsfest in der politischen Propaganda*, Mülheim an der Ruhr 2000, pp. 63–93; Schroeder, *Chef*, p. 55 f.; Sven-Felix Kellerhoff, “So feierte Adolf Hitler Weihnachten”, in: *Die Welt*, 25 December 2018, available online at {[www.welt.de/geschichte/zweiter-weltkrieg/article185955824/Nationalsozialismus-So-feierte-Adolf-Hitler-Weihnachten.html](http://www.welt.de/geschichte/zweiter-weltkrieg/article185955824/Nationalsozialismus-So-feierte-Adolf-Hitler-Weihnachten.html)}, last accessed 25 January 2024.
- 14 Jochmann (ed.), *Monologe*, p. 150.
- 15 Hürter (ed.), *Notizen*, p. 97; Picker, *Tischgespräche*, p. 283; Harald Sandner, *Hitler – Das Itinerar: Aufenthaltsorte und Reisen 1889–1945*, Berlin 2016, vol. 4, pp. 1979–1981.
- 16 Walter Görlitz (ed.), *Generalfeldmarschall Keitel: Verbrecher oder Offizier?*, Göttingen et al. 1961, p. 293.
- 17 Junge, *Bis zur letzten Stunde*, p. 301.
- 18 Hartmann, *Wehrmacht*, pp. 272–277; Kershaw, *Hitler* (vol. 2), p. 621; Heike Wüller, “‘Verwendung vor 1945’: Polizeidienst im NS-Staat im Spiegel Kölner Personalakten der Nachkriegszeit”, in: Harald Buhlan and Werner Jung (eds.), *Wessen Freund und wessen Helfer? Die Kölner Polizei im Nationalsozialismus*, Cologne 2000, pp. 633–668; Bert Hoppe, “Babyn Jar: Massenmord am Stadtrand”, in: *Osteuropa* 71 (2021), pp. 5–22; Florian Harms, “Die Opfer haben Namen”, in: *Der Spiegel*, 29 September 2016, available online at: {[www.spiegel.de/geschichte/massak](http://www.spiegel.de/geschichte/massak)

er-von-babi-jar-opfer-haben-namen-kommentar-a-1114350.html}, last accessed 24 January 2024.

- 19 Kaule, *Wolfsschanze*, p. 31; Peter Longerich, “Der ungeschriebene Befehl”, in: *Der Spiegel*, 12 August 2001, available online at {[www.spiegel.de/politik/der-ungeschriebene-befehl-a-430d6d39-0002-0001-0000-000019864687](http://www.spiegel.de/politik/der-ungeschriebene-befehl-a-430d6d39-0002-0001-0000-000019864687)}, last accessed 28 November 2024; Ulrich Herbert, “Vernichtungspolitik: Neue Antworten und Fragen zur Geschichte des ‘Holocaust’”, in: Herbert (ed.), *Nationalsozialistische Vernichtungspolitik 1939–1945: Neue Forschungen und Kontroversen*, Frankfurt/Main 1998, pp. 9–66, here: p. 62 f.; Fest, *Hitler*, p. 964; Kershaw, *Hitler* (vol. 2), p. 647, 685, & 1081; Shlomo Aronson, “Die dreifache Falle: Hitlers Judenpolitik, die Alliierten und die Juden”, in: *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 32 (1984), pp. 29–64; Görtemaker, *Hofstaat*, p. 300.
- 20 Ulrich Herbert, “Eine ‘Führerentscheidung’ zur ‘Endlösung’: Neue Ansätze in einer alten Diskussion”, in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 14/15 March 1998; Volker Ullrich, *Hitler: Die 101 wichtigsten Fragen*, Munich 2019, p. 138 f.; Frank Bajohr and Dieter Pohl, *Der Holocaust als offenes Geheimnis: Die Deutschen, die NS-Führung und die Alliierten*, Munich 2006, pp. 49, 55–65, & 84–106; Jochmann (ed.), *Monologe*, p. 143; Jörg Echternkamp, “Krieg und Holocaust”, in: *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*, {[www.bpb.de/themen/nationalsozialismus-zweiter-weltkrieg/der-zweite-weltkrieg/199409/krieg-und-holocaust](http://www.bpb.de/themen/nationalsozialismus-zweiter-weltkrieg/der-zweite-weltkrieg/199409/krieg-und-holocaust)}, last accessed 15 March 2024; Winkler, *Weg*, vol. 2, pp. 84–98; Michael Wildt, “Massenmord und Holocaust”, in: *Informationen zur politischen Bildung* 3 (2012), pp. 33–50; Aly, *Volksstaat*, pp. 114–158 & 311–318; Peter Longerich, “Tendenzen und Perspektiven der Täterforschung: Essay”, *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 14–15 (2007), pp. 3–7, here: p. 5.
- 21 Linge, *Untergang*, p. 135; Anne Feibelman, “Oral history interview with Rochus Misch”, {[https://collections.ushmm.org/oh\\_findingaids/RG-50.486.0028\\_tcn\\_de.pdf](https://collections.ushmm.org/oh_findingaids/RG-50.486.0028_tcn_de.pdf)}, last accessed 14 March 2024.
- 22 Loringhoven, *Bunker*, pp. 36 & 70; “Verhör Oberstleutnant Heins Waizenegger”; Sonnleithner, *Diplomat*, p. 109.
- 23 Von Below, *Adjutant*, p. 290 f.; Schulz, *Nachrichtenzentrale*, p. 98.
- 24 Linge, *Untergang*, pp. 136 & 264; Feuersenger, *Vorzimmer*, p. 226.
- 25 Hartlaub, *Aufzeichnungen*, p. 72; Eberle/Uhl, *Buch Hitler*, p. 195; Kershaw, *Hitler* (vol. 2), pp. 752 & 848 f.; Loringhoven, *Bunker*, p. 80; Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, pp. 317 f. & 577–579, Pyta, *Hitler*, p. 203.

- 26 Loringhoven, *Bunker*, pp. 74–81; Speer, *Erinnerungen*, p. 255.
- 27 Linge, *Untergang*, p. 166; Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, pp. 303–319 (citations: p. 309, p. 314, & p. 317); Loringhoven, *Bunker*, p. 101.
- 28 Linge, *Untergang*, p. 265; Haffner, *Anmerkungen*, p. 26; Fest, *Hitler*, p. 955; Loringhoven, *Bunker*, p. 43.
- 29 Linge, *Untergang*, p. 17; Speer, *Erinnerungen*, pp. 255 & 316 f.
- 30 “Adolf Hitler – Anatomie eines Diktators”, in: *Der Spiegel*, 3 March 1964; Linge, *Untergang*, pp. 17, 166, 227, & 265; Feuersenger, *Vorzimmer*, pp. 249–253; Loringhoven, *Bunker*, pp. 77–80; Manstein, *Verlorene Siege*, p. 316; Rose, *Schaub*, p. 270.
- 31 Von Below, *Adjutant*, pp. 386 f. & 398; “Himmler an SS-Gruppenführer Fegelein (Führerhauptquartier) Himmler”, 26 July 1944, in: Heiber/Heiber (eds.), *Rückseite*, p. 387; Feuersenger, *Vorzimmer*, p. 248 f.
- 32 Sandner, *Itinerar*, vol. 4, p. 2273; Junge, *Bis zur letzten Stunde*, p. 163.
- 33 *Ibid.*, p. 163 f.; Schroeder, *Chef*, p. 91; Warlimont, *Hauptquartier*, p. 516; von Below, *Adjutant*, p. 395.
- 34 Zarzecki, *Führerhauptquartier*, p. 123; Conrad, Neumärker, & Woywodt, *Wolfsschanze*, pp. 161–163; Kaule, *Wolfsschanze*, p. 41 f.; Mathias Beer, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen: Voraussetzungen, Verlauf, Folgen*, Munich 2011, p. 69 f.
- 35 Conrad, Neumärker, & Woywodt, *Wolfsschanze*, p. 164 (here, 27 January 1945 is incorrectly given as the date of the capture of Rastenburg by the Red Army); Stüben, “Rastenburg/Kętrzyn”; Franca Giansoldati, “Martyrertum und Mut: Die Geschichte der ermordeten Nonnen im Januar 1945”, in: *Il Messaggero*, {[www.ilmessaggero.it/en/martyrertum\\_und\\_mut\\_die\\_geschichte\\_der\\_ermordeten\\_nonnen\\_im\\_januar\\_1945-8019187.html?refresh\\_ce](http://www.ilmessaggero.it/en/martyrertum_und_mut_die_geschichte_der_ermordeten_nonnen_im_januar_1945-8019187.html?refresh_ce)}, last accessed 26 March 2024; “Christophora Klomfass e 14 compagne”, {[www.causesanti.va/it/santi-e-beati/christophora-klomfass-e-14-compagne.html](http://www.causesanti.va/it/santi-e-beati/christophora-klomfass-e-14-compagne.html)}, last accessed 15 April 2024.
- 36 “Die Lust am Untergang”, in: *Stern*, 10 January 1974; Joachim Fest and Bernd Eichinger, *Der Untergang: Das Filmbuch*, Reinbek bei Hamburg 2004, p. 81.
- 37 Włodzimierz Borodziej, “Polen und Deutschland seit 1945”, in: *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 53 (1997), pp. 11–20, available online at {[www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/apuz/archiv/538357/polen-und-deutschland-seit-1945](http://www.bpb.de/shop/zeitschriften/apuz/archiv/538357/polen-und-deutschland-seit-1945)}, last accessed 17 April 2024.
- 38 Zarzecki, *Führerhauptquartier*, pp. 129–140; Janusz Tycner, “Schauplatz

- Wolfsschanze", in: *Die Zeit*, 24 June 1994; Wiegrefe, "Helden und Mörder".
- 39 "Hitlers 'Wolfsschanze' als Touristenziel", in: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 3 June 1957; "'Wolfsschanze': 'Gemütlich Kaffee oder einen guten Wein trinken'", in: *Der Spiegel*, 29 July 1973.
- 40 "Hitlers Wolfsschanze – Ein Disneyland des Grauens", in: *Die Welt*, 30 December 1992; "Die Wolfsnest GmbH", in: *Der Spiegel*, 11 July 2004; PAAA, B 42-ZA 1330568, letter from Philipp Freiherr von Boeselager to Minister of State Mertes, 11 October 1983; letter from Minister of State Mertes to von Boeselager, 9 November 1983; letter from the German Embassy to the German Foreign Office, 7 August 1984.
- 41 "Auf Knopfdruck", in: *Der Spiegel*, 18 December 1977; "Ganz normaler Auftrag", in: *Der Spiegel*, 25 July 1993; "Bunker bunkern!", in: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 15 June 1998.
- 42 Carolin Emcke, Anton Maegerle, & Christoph Mestmacher, "Druck von der Straße", in: *Der Spiegel*, 19 March 2000; "Wehrsportgruppen-Mann als Rep-Kandidat, in: *taz.die tageszeitung*, 15 February 1990; Felix Lee, "Kameradschaft ist abgeschafft", in: *taz.die tageszeitung*, 10 March 2005.
- 43 The 'spatial turn' can largely be traced back to sociologist Henri Lefebvre's conception of space. For Lefebvre, a space "in and of itself", detached from a society, cannot be considered to exist as a "thing". Only through social practice does space become a "lived" space. "Space has long since ceased to be a physical and territorial concept. Instead, space is a relational concept," summarises literary and cultural studies scholar Doris Bachmann-Medick. "For the *spatial turn*, it is not territorial space as a container or receptacle that is central, but space as a social process of producing perception, use, and appropriation." Other important points of reference for the spatial turn are Michel Foucault's reflections on the intertwining relationship between space and power, and Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the "production of social space as a habitualised form of practice". See Doris Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns: Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften*, Hamburg 2018, pp. 292–293; Till Kinzel, "Spatial Turn", in: Stephan Günzel (ed.), *Raum: Ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch*, Stuttgart/Weimar 2010, pp. 90–99, here: p. 91.
- 44 Dietrich, *12 Jahre*, p. 125.
- 45 Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann and Erich-Peter Neumann (eds.), *Allens-*



- bacher Jahrbuch der öffentlichen Meinung 1958–1964*, Allensbach 1965, p. 229; Bohr, *Kriegsverbrecherlobby*, pp. 220–222 & 351.
- 46 “Polens Präsident fordert Entschädigung von Deutschland”, in: *Spiegel.de*, {[www.spiegel.de/ausland/polen-praesident-andrzej-duda-erneuert-entschaedigungsforderungen-an-deutschland-a-e3ed-c6d1-od9e-4f5f-bdfd-643762ffd11e](http://www.spiegel.de/ausland/polen-praesident-andrzej-duda-erneuert-entschaedigungsforderungen-an-deutschland-a-e3ed-c6d1-od9e-4f5f-bdfd-643762ffd11e)}, last accessed 22 September 2024; “Klare Absage an Polens Forderungen”, in: *Tagesschau.de*, {[www.tagesschau.de/ausland/europa/polen-reparationsforderungen-101.html](http://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/europa/polen-reparationsforderungen-101.html)}, last accessed 22 September 2024.
- 47 Felix Ackermann, “Gedächtnislücke Warschau”, in: *spiegel.de*, {[www.spiegel.de/geschichte/80-jahre-warschauer-aufstand-warum-die-ns-aufarbeitung-der-deutschen-lueckenhaft-ist-a-5e2e4f90-ef1f-4922-a698-do7e71b3d6bd](http://www.spiegel.de/geschichte/80-jahre-warschauer-aufstand-warum-die-ns-aufarbeitung-der-deutschen-lueckenhaft-ist-a-5e2e4f90-ef1f-4922-a698-do7e71b3d6bd)}, last accessed 22 September 2024.
- 48 Christoph Hickmann, “Gerade noch anstrengende Nachbarn, jetzt wieder gute Freunde”, in: *spiegel.de*, {[www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/kanzler-olaf-scholz-in-polen-gerade-noch-anstrengende-nachbarn-jetzt-wieder-gute-freunde-a-ffbd8b2d-4a3b-4afb-aff3-5ebffc1c71c3](http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/kanzler-olaf-scholz-in-polen-gerade-noch-anstrengende-nachbarn-jetzt-wieder-gute-freunde-a-ffbd8b2d-4a3b-4afb-aff3-5ebffc1c71c3)}, last accessed 22 September 2024.
- 49 Johan Schloemann, “Wie die extreme Rechte den 20. Juli instrumentalisiert”, in: *sueddeutsche.de*, {[www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/20-juli-stauffenberg-hitler-attentat-widerstand-afd-lux.JauXdPzDBZCT7jr-BE5ECc6](http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/20-juli-stauffenberg-hitler-attentat-widerstand-afd-lux.JauXdPzDBZCT7jr-BE5ECc6)}, last accessed 22 September 2024; AfD parliamentary group in the Bundestag, Wir gedenken der mutigen Widerstandskämpfer des 20. Juli 1944!, {[www.youtube.com/watch?v=ALc\\_j4-qyKE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ALc_j4-qyKE)}, last accessed 22 September 2024; Katja Thorwarth, “Der AfD-Mann und die Wolfsschanze”, in: *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 10 January 2019.