

**THE GIRL WHO
SHOOK HANDS WITH
HITLER**

CHAPTER 1

August 2, 2003

Skokie, Illinois

I never heard the shot that killed Hitler but, then, I'm not sure I would have. It was awfully noisy in the Bunker there at the end, what with the artillery falling in the garden, overhead and all. Kempka told us Hitler had killed himself and that makes sense, I guess. It always seemed like the only way he would ever die would be by his own hand. I swear, if you looked at the scrapes he had been in, all those years in the trenches and then the assassination attempts, it was enough to make you believe in pacts with the devil.

The last time I saw him was in the main dining room. There were about twenty of us in there when he came by to say goodbye and I remember how wet his eyes looked under the artificial light. When he was done he went down the stairs to his suite and none of us ever saw him again. Then the most astonishing thing happened and to this day I don't know how to explain it. A wonderful feeling of relief and lightness spread over the whole room and everybody was happy and chattering for the first time in years. People dropped their ranks and junior officers laughed and burbled along with members of the High Command. They say the same thing happened in the canteen where the enlisted men ate. People began to sing and dance and the whole place turned so rowdy Martin had to send somebody up to ask for quiet. I don't want to sound too mystic about all this, but it really was as if some kind of poisonous spell had finally lifted.

Over the years, I've spent a lot of time trying to remember those last few hours in the Bunker and, the more I've thought about them, the stranger they seem. The truth is, I'm not sure I could have missed something like a gun shot. The explosions overhead had to come through so many layers of dirt and gravel they were just muffled concussions by the time they reached us, and the sound of a pistol would have been as hard to overlook as the bite of a whip in a pillow fight. And nobody ever saw Hitler's body except Kempka and it's hard to see what kind of evidence that is. The man was Hitler's chauffeur and he was so loyal he actually divorced his wife because Hitler thought she looked Jewish.

Besides, can you imagine Hitler, of all people, not having worked out some way to escape? Everybody else had, that's for sure. Himmler, Speer, Goering, everybody,

had their plans. Operation Land of Fire was shipping U-Boat-loads of stolen jewels and treasure to Argentina, and he would have been in on that, the same way he was in on everything else. One thing you have to say about Hitler is that he never forgot to take care of himself. He hung on to power all those years with that gang of thugs around him and nobody ever outmaneuvered him. Even at the very end when he was a shrunken old man, even when everything had fallen apart and everybody in his government was plotting against him, he still stayed on top.

Not that he would have told me what he had in mind of course. As closely as we worked together, that was just the kind of thing he would never have mentioned. What I am sure of, though, is that if he really had wanted to get out, the pieces were all there. In the first place, Otto Skorzeny had dropped out of sight. Otto always claimed Hitler had him down in Bavaria setting up the Werewolf organization but nothing ever came of that, and something came of everything when Otto was involved. And, then, Hanna Reitsch flew in at the last minute the way she did, the one person in the world who could have gotten him through the Russian air defenses at the very end. I can't imagine any other reason he would have brought her to Berlin, certainly not just because she was Ritter von Greim's girlfriend and he wanted to make von Greim the new head of the Air Force, for Heaven's sakes. Von Greim could have accomplished that much more easily just by staying in Rechlin. So what it comes down to is that I heard the same stories about the suicide as everybody else. But I can't say for sure one way or the other what really happened.

12 April 1945

Berlin, Greater German Reich

Gatow Airport

It was less than twenty miles to the Chancellery – but for General von Greim and *Flugkapitan* Hanna Reitsch it might have been twenty thousand, the trip was so difficult.

The Russians held all the roads. The sky was swarming with Soviet fighters. The runway at Gatow was cratered by artillery. And the *Fieseler* Stork that was supposed to take them into the city had been hit by a shell just as they were about to climb aboard.

There was nothing to do but wait until another Stork could be made ready. Under the bombardment, that took from just after dawn when they arrived until six that afternoon when they finally flew out – with von Greim at the controls and Hanna Reitsch in the passenger seat behind him.

They skimmed over the Wannsee, shining peaceful and dreamy in the late afternoon sun.

Then over the Grunewald – dodging across the treetops – staying out of sight of the enemy until, all at once, yellow light exploded to their left, throwing dark shadows through the cabin.

Then gray light flashed to the front – so bright it shown red through their eyelids.

Then burst after burst overhead and shrapnel raining down on the wings like hail in a thunder cloud Hanna had flown in long ago.

Von Greim threw the controls and dove. A team of Russians manning a heavy machine gun froze for a minute and then started to fire, too late as he jerked the rudder to the left – their tracers flashing just behind the right wing.

Then back to the right and climb for an instant.

And buzz down toward another field swarming with Russians, faces pale in the evening light as they turned toward the plane.

Then over a clump of trees and onto a platoon of anti-tank gunners carrying rocket-tubes on their shoulders.

Then another yellow flash.

And another.

And another – the little Stork bucking as it rode over the explosions.

Something slapped into the plane and gasoline began spraying from a hole in the right wing tank – as streams of tracers probed the sky like searchlights.

And found them.

A tearing crash and von Greim shouted and passed out, his foot shattered by an armor-piercing bullet.

Hanna reached around him for the stick, hugging him from behind the way she so often imagined doing at night. Mist was streaming from both wing tanks, now. One round – a single tracer in that spray – and they would go up in a ball of flame.

She jinked to the left and, then, back to the right – slipping to the side rather than banking because she couldn't get at the foot petals. Trying to keep her bearings in the flashes and explosions when, suddenly, the stick pulled away from her hand and she had to fight to bring it back.

And then jerked away again, more strongly, as the Stork bored down toward a burning church before von Greim passed out a second time – and the stick fell from his hand.

Near the center of Berlin the ground fire slackened off, leaving her to find her way through the dust and smoke and yellow smell of sulfur. But she had trained over the city for emergency flights and homed on the big radio tower.

From there she knew the compass bearing to the Tiergarten and was heading in – when the stick pulled from her hand once more. And, again, she had to fight for control as von Greim, half-conscious and very strong, struggled to fly the plane.

Then, through the smoke, she could make out the red lanterns outlining the Unter den Linden. She eased down onto the street and bounced a little as she hit. And rolled forward, past craters and overturned cars and broken trees almost to the Brandenburg Gate – just as the engine cut off. It was out of gas.

She helped von Greim from the plane, the whole area spooky and deserted – like some ancient ruin – and waited in no man's land among the burned-out bunkers and empty shell holes. Once, there was a burst of gunfire off in the haze. And then it was quiet again.

At last she spotted a truck moving shadowy through the dust and smoke. Luck was still with her. It was German.

She and the driver helped von Greim aboard. Then drove past the piles of rubble and broken walls that had once been the proudest buildings in the new Reich – past the Ministry of the Interior and the President's Palace and the Foreign Ministry – to Hitler's bunker under what was left of the Chancellery.

CHAPTER 2

August 3, 2003

Skokie, Illinois

I spent my last few hours as a Nazi sitting at the switchboard taking messages. It wasn't as if there were a lot to take, anymore, I just jotted down the reports the local commanders phoned in, trying to keep track of the Russian positions so we could find our way out when it finally got dark. It was Walpurgis Night, the night of the Witches' Orgy. I remembered that from Catholic school.

I wasn't worried about dying, exactly, it's just that everything was going to be so different in the morning, and the next day, and the day after that and the month afterwards and all the years to come and I couldn't see how I would ever manage to get from where I was to where I would be. In the mean time, there was nothing to do but listen on the phone as the Iron Curtain crashed down over Berlin. That was Goebbels' phrase, you know, the Iron Curtain. I know Churchill took credit for it after the war, but it was Goebbels who dreamed it up, the way he dreamed up so much else.

It's funny it would have been Grandfather who started me on the road to being at the switchboard that night. All he'd really wanted was for me to learn a trade. He'd apprenticed as a furniture maker and, through all those years in the Customs Bureau he always felt as if he had a skill he could fall back on. Of course the one time he really needed to work, after he lost his money in the inflation, nobody was hiring, but thinking he could make furniture made him feel good about himself and that was the feeling he wanted for me. Or, maybe, it was just all those years of having to support Mother that made him so insistent.

Times being what they were, there was only one trade open to me if I didn't want to work at the phone company, and it wasn't long before I was pounding away on those huge cast-iron machines they kept at the typing school. I hated that. It would take me forever to finish a letter, what with having to erase through the original and three carbons every time I made a mistake. By the time I was done, the paper always looked more like calico than business correspondence, it had so many eraser spots. I never would have graduated if it hadn't been for the piano. "You didn't have so much trouble with that, lieblich," Grandfather kept after me, "I know you can learn to type." And, of course, he was right, piano had come easily to me. Besides, I'd seen what had

happened to Mother, too, and I kept putting more paper in the machine and starting again.

Shorthand was another story. I was already good at that, good enough, as it turned out, to do it without really thinking. The system we studied used little squiggles and, the thing was, there weren't any rules about the squiggles, you could choose whatever you wanted. The other girls just used the same ones as the old Frau who ran the school so, mostly, they could read each others' notes. But nobody could read mine. I'd been practicing for years with the secret Arabic letters Kristina and I had worked out back in Essen and, by the time I started that class, I was already a whiz with them. And they made me a whiz at shorthand.

Things were picking up when I graduated, and jobs were easy to get, but the other girls still had to clip ads. Not me, though, I had a letter from the Government inviting me by for an interview. I think the old Frau who ran the typing school must have given them my name or, maybe, it was Mother. She had a lot of friends in the Party by then, and, of course, I'd already been checked out by the SS.

I didn't know anybody who had ever actually been inside the Chancellery, of course, and, when the morning came, I felt terribly out of place clicking across the black and white marble squares of the enormous entry hall in my high heels. A receptionist led me up a long, ceremonial staircase and left me in a beautiful room glowing with summer light from elegant, fan-topped windows. I sat up very straight on the edge of an ornate chair, trying to look as if I belonged there. I couldn't believe a girl like me might actually get to work in such a place.

Then, all at once the door at the back swung open, a guard stepped in and came to attention, and there was Hitler himself, standing right in front of me, the sun from the windows blazing around his head like an aura of fire. I almost fainted. I stumbled to my feet, apologizing and trying to back out but he just put his hands on his hips and laughed, "please don't end our interview so soon, Mrs Mueller, we've spent entirely too much time checking your references." And, then, he asked me about Essen. He could have just read my resume, I suppose, or the letter from my teacher, but, at the time, I was sure he remembered me from the Harvest Festival in Bavaria. The fact is I'm still sure of it.

He had me tell him about myself and it never crossed my mind to wonder what the Fuehrer was doing interviewing pool secretaries. When I was done he fixed me with those piercing blue eyes, and wanted to know what had happened that time on my honeymoon with the Polish border guards. I told him everything, of course. It was

impossible to keep anything from him but, to this day, I can't imagine how he could have known about something like that.

He just stared into my face while I answered, making me feel naked, as if he could see to my very soul, just as he had at the Harvest Festival. When I finished, he asked me, "am I to understand you never told your good husband about those Polish swine?" I nodded. I had been too embarrassed to tell Heinz how the border guards had made those suggestive gestures at me.

I was trembling by the time Hitler spoke again. I still don't know exactly what he saw in me, maybe he just realized how thoroughly he had me by then. "That's good," I can still hear him saying it, as if he'd just stepped out of the room, "I need a woman who can be discreet," making me proud, now that I think about it, for the whore's trick of keeping secrets from her husband. "Tell Fraulein Bauer that you're to be my private shorthand secretary." His eyes never left my face.

It's curious how it all worked out, I guess. It was so different from anything I'd ever expected when I first went to work at the Chancellery. Only Grandfather had the wit to understand what I was getting myself into and he just told me to be careful. "History doesn't care about individuals, Ilse. Don't try to get too close to it." I didn't have a clue what he was talking about, of course. I was much too young.

That was what it came down to, I think, how young we all were. It wasn't just me, either, it was everybody. A whole generation, a whole world, really. Everybody young and hopeful with a bright new leader to show us the way. It was an age of the triumph of hope over experience, a time when everything seemed possible.

14 July 1931

Grunau, Lower Silesia, German Republic

Hanna Reitsch was born to fly. Ever since she'd been tiny she had watched the birds – or just the clouds drifting by – and felt homesick she had longed to be with them so badly.

She was the only girl in her flight school the day her instructor let her use the new glider. It was her first free flight, the very first time she was ever allowed to take up a plane for the sheer fun of it. And keep it up as long as she could.

It was a pretty day. The wind rose fresh off the crest of the Galgenberg as she sat in the cockpit ready to launch. A good day for soaring.

"HEAVE."

And the teams of men pulling the launch cable began to walk forward. And
"DOUBLE." And they began to run. And

"AWAY." And she was: swooping over the ridge and turning into the wind, and out over the meadows and fields and the little road she bicycled along every day to get to the glider school. Off in the distance shone the steep roofs, the spires of the church and the patch of cobblestones of the marketplace in her home town. Below, a tractor was pulling a farm cart loaded with rubble. She waved to the workmen and they waved back and then she soared into the sky toward the Silesian Mountains smiling in the distance.

And then back along the valley.

And higher as she caught an updraft and drifted down again, singing aloud to herself and to God, following the buzzards and hawks, looking for rising air.

Her father thought she was in medical school, learning to be a doctor like himself. He was proud of his daughter's gumption, proud she was so determined to make a success of herself in a man's field. He had already paid for the entire year. She hadn't attended a single class.

The hard seat began to hurt but she scarcely noticed, her thoughts dancing across the forested slopes to the north and along the peaks of the Riesengebirge to the south.

Her four brothers would have laughed, and her sister would have admired her, while using duty as the reason to talk her out of what she was doing.

She began to have to go to the bathroom but she hardly noticed that, either, with the woods and hills and fields, castles and country mansions sliding beneath her.

Only her mother, her strong, gentle mother who had given her so much of her own strength, would have understood and cheered her.

She hardly noticed when the sky clouded and the rain drumming on the wings drowned out the snatches of sound drifting up from below.

Or when the rain turned to snow.

When she finally brought the glider down, five and a half hours after she had taken off, she could scarcely land for the people crowded around the field. And she could hardly walk when she got out, her legs were so cramped. Not noticing the time, not seeing anything but the beauty around her, she had stayed in the air longer than any of the other students in the school.

Or any of her instructors,

Or, for that matter, any other woman in the world.

Hanna Reitsch, a nineteen-year-old girl on her first unrestricted flight, a student flyer barely five feet tall and weighing eighty-nine pounds, had shattered the world's endurance record for unpowered aircraft.

May 1934

Hirschberg, Lower Silesia Gau, German Reich

She was walking along the warm, spring street, wearing a thin dress, sandals and short stockings. It was hot and sunny and, as on all days when she couldn't fly, she felt homesick when she looked at the sky. But luck was with her. A car bounced to a stop and her flight instructor called her over. He was on his way to make a powered flight over the city to take some pictures. Would she like to come along behind, towed in a glider?

Would she? She was in the car and at the airfield and in the cockpit without putting on a flight jacket or goggles or even a helmet. She just buckled the parachute right over her dress.

Her instructor thought it would be a good day to practice flying blind. Just watch the instruments to get the feeling of flying at night. Or in a cloud.

She dropped the tow line at twelve hundred feet and began to drift down, casting about for rising air. She didn't know much about thermals, having trained on the wind blowing up and over the Galgenberg. At about two hundred and fifty feet she found an updraft and settled back to track her rate of climb.

A foot per second.

Then five.

Then nine.

Fifteen hundred feet in two and a half minutes.

Then she looked out and saw what was sucking her up. A huge, black storm cloud.

It seemed like fun to her. A chance to really try out her instruments.

At thirty-six hundred feet she broke into the cloud and it was dark around her. Then she really started to shoot upwards.

Twenty feet per second and, for the first time, she began to worry. Not about what the cloud could do to her – she was too innocent of clouds to be concerned about that – but because she really couldn't see out. What if she flew into a mountain?

That turned out to be the least of her worries, though. When she checked her altimeter she was already higher than the highest peak in the area and she sat back to enjoy the ride.

But not for long. Suddenly the cockpit shook with the roll of a million drumsticks beating on the wings – the ripping thunder of rain and hail tearing into the fabric of her little plane.

When, finally, the insane rattle stopped, the wind slammed into her, throwing her against the harness, the straps cutting into her thin body through her thinner dress.

8,500 feet.

9,200 feet.

9,750 feet.

And up and up until the instruments froze solid from the rain and the cold. And, without instruments, without being able to see past the windows for the cloud, she couldn't even know how to keep level.

Up and up until she began to hear whistling and knew she was about to stall but, before she could push the nose down, the blood slammed into her head and it was too late – she was hanging from the straps as the plane fell onto its back.

And then caught itself and turned over into a nose-dive at terrifying speed.

And threw her into her seat.

And jerked her forward again as it began to loop.

The controls wouldn't answer, the instruments didn't work and the windows were so iced-up she couldn't have seen out if she had been flying over sunny countryside.

She punched her fist through the mica windshield.

And got a blast of wind and rain and ice in the face.

Drenched and freezing, her wet summer frock plastered to her body, her hair streaming behind her like the tail of a comet, she gave up trying to fly. The plane began to climb again – so fast the blood drained from her head and she almost passed out. And, for the first time, knew real fear. And began to yell to calm herself.

HANNNNAAAAAAA. YAAAA! YAAAAAA! COWAAAARRRRRRDDDDDD.
HANG ON, CAN'T YOU? COWAAAARRRRRRDDDDDDDD.

And heard her voice, thin above the roar, and almost steadied herself.

Then the plane lurched upward again, pushing her into her seat, draining the blood from her head as the fear snapped its teeth and swallowed her alive.

And then it was all over. Light began to creep in through the sheets of ice. The winds calmed and she looked up and saw what she thought she would never see again. The soft Earth golden in the late afternoon sun. And the sky shining below her.

She righted the little plane and drifted down toward the snow-covered ridge of the Riesengebirge, too numb from cold and the memory of fear to try to get back to the valley.

She skidded on the snow beside a restaurant and climbed out, the fabric on her plane hanging in rags from the storm.

It was cozy inside with the warm smell of fresh coffee. Skiers lounging beside the fire stared at her, suspicious of this tiny woman in a wet dress, hair clinging like dripping string to her head.

Then somebody noticed the glider and they all ran to the window and she learned for the first time where she had come down: in the neutral zone on the Czech border. She would probably have her license lifted and, for the second time that day, she knew real fear.

But she wasn't going to let the government take away her right to fly any more than she was going to let herself die in a storm cloud. She phoned her instructor and, once it was completely dark, he flew over and dropped a launch cable. Then she organized the skiers into teams to pull and

HEAVE and

DOUBLE and

AWAY and into the black emptiness over a cliff.

Her wings bit and she was rising back into the night sky and softly over the ridge toward the valley to bump gently into a pasture outside Hirschberg, landing by the headlights of trucks her instructor had parked around the field.

And into the books again. Without a flight plan or a flight suit or a helmet or goggles or a warm jacket, without even meaning to do so, Hanna Reitsch had set the world's women's altitude record.

February 1937

**Darmstadt-Griesheim, Westmark
Gau, German Reich**

The day the Luftwaffe hired Hanna Reitsch as a test pilot, Ernst Udet, the dapper, cigar-smoking Technical Director had been watching her demonstrate a new type of air brake. He had seen her show them off once before and had been so impressed he had asked her to demonstrate them again, this time in front of the chief designers from the big German aircraft firms.

They watched as she was towed higher and higher, almost out of sight, and then cast off and nosed over into a dive and fell straight down toward the field from thirteen thousand feet.

The designers gasped, none of them had ever seen a glider go into a vertical dive before – at least not one it could survive. The speeds it would build up would tear it to pieces when she tried to pull out.

Twelve thousand feet.

Eleven thousand feet.

Falling out of the sky.

Ten thousand.

Nine thousand.

Straight down.

Eight thousand.

Seven thousand.

But what they couldn't see was that she was holding her speed steady at a hundred and twenty-five miles per hour. She had been working with the air brakes for months, ever since she had joined the Glider Research Institute as a test pilot.

Six thousand.

Five thousand.

Hanging from her harness – feet on the pedals, mouth open, screaming to release the pressure in her ears – she dropped like a hawk straight at them.

Three thousand.

Two thousand.

Still she plunged until, at six hundred feet she pulled out, drew in the air brakes, and landed soft as an autumn leaf in front of the reviewing stand.

Technical Director Udet was on the apron waiting for her when she climbed down, bundled in her big flight jacket against the cold. His first thought was of how tiny she was.

When he reached her, he addressed her as "*Flugkapitan*." It was an honorary title, but a nice honor, and he gave it to her on the spot. Flight Captain Hanna Reitsch, the only woman in Germany ever to be so honored. And that wasn't all.

He asked her to join the Luftwaffe as a test pilot, the first woman for that honor, too, but there was nothing honorary about it. It would be fast and dangerous and exciting and she accepted at once. As patriotic as she was, she would have joined the Air Force as a cook, if he'd asked, but flying was her life. And in the Luftwaffe she would be flying the hottest planes in the world. How hot some of those planes were few people in Germany – and almost no one anywhere else – would have believed that afternoon.

11 March 1938

Vienna, Austria

HEIL

SIEG

HEIL

The square in front of the Austrian Chancellery was filled with swastikas. On flags. On armbands. Scrawled on walls. And people were everywhere, running and shouting.

SIEG

HEIL

SIEG

HEIL

Loudspeakers booming, Arthur Seyss-Inquart harangued from the balcony while mobs of Brownshirts raised their arms in salute.

SIEG

HEIL

SIEG

HEIL

And Austrian Nationalists just raised their fists.

A red flag unreeled from a window on the other side of the square. A gang of Nazis raced into the building and the flag fluttered to the street. Nobody saw what happened to the Communists inside.

Otto Skorzeny was with the crowd, keeping an eye on things. He had been picked by the Vienna Gymnastic Club to help the police keep order. Nazi order. They chose him because he was six foot four, muscular, broad shouldered, had a jagged dueling scar running from his left temple to the side of his mouth – and people tended to do what he said.

SIEG

HEIL

Even the Nationalist toughs stood back from him, a little, and he had a good view of the balcony. And the side gate, when it opened. And the limousine that slid out behind the police lines and slipped away from the square. And the face of President Miklas riding in back.

Before it was out of sight someone grabbed his arm.

It was the head of the Gymnastic Club. Hard to hear in all the racket but Skorzeny got the point.

". . . headed for the Presidential Palace . . ."

SIEG

". . . You must prevent . . ."

HEIL

"battle . . ."

SIEG

"Have them call . . ."

HEIL

". . . Inquart."

Otto Skorzeny was off, pushing his way out of the square to his parked car. Most people made a path for him but some didn't notice him coming. Once, he had to shake off a group of young men in brown shirts who, seeing his armband, wanted him for some purpose of their own.

He ran past a squad of police and found his car and, within seconds, was pulling onto the avenue that led to the Presidential Palace. President Miklas had a big lead but Otto Skorzeny was willing to drive much faster.

Police stood at every intersection, partly to make room for the Presidential convoy. Partly to control the chaotic city. Some waved him through, some did not, but

he only stopped once, when a big army truck swerved into the road ahead of him. And then, only to spin around to the right, just missing a flock of nuns on bicycles.

He could see the Presidential limousine ahead but he couldn't come near it. It was surrounded by cars - Nazi Defense Squads - following it to the palace. Looking for a fight. Every time he tried to pass, one would swerve in front of him.

He honked and pointed at his armband.

They honked back and pointed at their own armbands. One even gave him a stiff, Hitler salute.

By the time they reached the palace, Miklas was disappearing through the doors and Nazis were pouring in behind.

Skorzeny dashed inside, expecting shots. Ready to dive for cover.

And spotted the president halfway up an ornamental staircase.

And yelled over the crowd. "Herr Praesident , I've been . . ."

HALT OR I FIRE.

A squad of guards was at the top, armed and glaring.

President Miklas was glaring, too. Pushing and shouting dismayed him. He did not like having armed Germans on his border and he did not like having armed Nazis in his palace. And he especially did not like having a giant, scar-faced Nazi bandit grabbing at him on his own staircase. He was ready to do something, and this roughneck would be his example.

Safety catches clicked.

But not from above. From the Defense Squads milling below. One shot, and a blood bath.

Miklas paused.

The guards waited.

The crowd stared.

And Otto Skorzeny took charge.

And yelled the first thing that came to his mind.

NONSENSE. QUIET I SAY.

And everyone was quiet, looking to the huge man on the staircase to tell them what to do next. A man with no credentials at all save the force of his own overwhelming personality. It was President Miklas who broke the silence.

"Who the devil are you?"

Skorzeny answered loud so everyone could hear.

"I am from the Chancellor, there is to be no trouble among Austrians. And you . . ."

Miklas knew there wasn't any chancellor, that's what all the shouting in the street had been about – his refusal to go along with Hitler's demand to appoint Seyss-Inquart to the job. But he didn't care to debate the point in front of a mob. And, besides, the thug on the staircase never gave him the chance.

". . . and you," Skorzeny pointed to the lieutenant of the guard, "You will be held personally responsible for any shooting."

If there was one thing the lieutenant wasn't interested in it was personal responsibility – especially not for any shooting. The guards lowered their weapons.

But the crisis wasn't over. The guard was still armed and so was the mob. And somebody had to get them apart.

Skorzeny gestured to the Nazis below, "National Socialist Comrades, the Chancellor has honored you with the duty of securing the Presidential Palace. Take up your posts outside."

And, to the guards, "you will patrol the inside of the palace."

The Nazis trooped out, the guards went back to their posts, and the two groups were separated.

And President Miklas gave up and appointed Arthur Seyss-Inquart chancellor that same afternoon and – with Nationalist resistance blocked in both the Palace and the Chancellery – Hitler's troops crossed the border to such a joyous reception that the invasion of Austria came to be known as the Blumenkrieg – the battle of flowers.

And Doctor Ernst Kaltenbrunner, the Chief of the SS in Austria, heard about what had happened in the Presidential Palace and was impressed. And remembered Otto Skorzeny as someone who might be useful to the Party in the future.

Summer 1938

The Baltic Sea

A LITTLE SILENCE TO BE APPRECIATED

Then the intercom fell quiet and it really was silent in the forward torpedo room, just the sloshing of air in the ballast tanks as the boat glided beneath the cold waves of the Baltic.

Theo Maus leaned back against the torpedo racks, waiting.

Waiting for the voice from the control room.

LOAD TUBES ONE THROUGH FOUR.

Then slap open the hatches and wheel the torpedoes along the tracks into the tubes. One at a time. Heavy work, until they could report back.

"Tubes one through four, loaded," and wait again.

Torpedoman Theo Maus thought of the U-47 as a crocodile lying beneath the surface of a jungle stream.

Waiting.

Waiting for the sudden snap and the quick struggle and then slide under the water to wait some more. Until

FLOOD TUBES ONE THROUGH FOUR

Then spring and slap and report back while the water was still surging into the tubes.

"One through four, flooded."

And wait again, listening to the air splashing in the tanks while the boat slid forward.

His father had spent the Kaiser's war shoveling coal in the Kaiser's fleet and Theo had inherited his taste for the sea. And his genes. Short and swarthy, bow legs and black hair, the way he looked made him uncomfortable on land. But not when he was in the 47 being a crocodile. When he was underwater he was the best in the Navy, arming and loading torpedoes. And the others knew it, and respected him for it. Of them all, only the cook still teased him about his looks, but Theo didn't mind.

"Not a Maus, Theo, a Ratte." The cook would laugh as he slid him an extra piece of cheese with his meal, "so you can bite the British when the time comes."

They would all bite the British when the time came, Theo was sure of that. He was proud to be on the 47, proud to be with Captain Prien – that man would make a name for himself and, wherever he went, Torpedoman Theo Maus in the forward torpedo room would get there first.

In the control room, Lieutenant Commander Guenther Prien was proud of his boat, too. He eased it forward.

"Stand by to attack."

He could see the Norwegian freighter, lit like a Christmas tree, closing on the port bow.

"Steady on five zero."

Closing

Closing

"Target speed eight knots."

Almost close enough.

"Range 2700 meters."

The Norweger had no idea she was steaming into a wolf pack.

"Tubes one and four fire . . . NOW."

Then wait a few seconds and

"Tubes two and three fire . . . NOW."

Lieutenant Commander Guenther Prien grinned to himself. That was the third freighter in eighteen hours. And not one of them had felt a thing.

Later, the radio operator handed him a message

FORM UP IN SEARCH LINE AT 19 DEGREES 26 MINUTES E 55
DEGREES 02 MINUTES NORTH FOR SWEDISH ORE CARRIER BEARING
37 DEGREES

Lieutenant Commander Prien knew he would close with that merchantman. Or one of the other captains would.

The war games weren't half over but everybody knew the results already. With the new underwater radio guiding the wolf packs, the submarines would sweep the Atlantic of enemy shipping if war really came.