

GOERING

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Himmler aspired to my position as successor to the Fuehrer but he concealed his aspirations. He never exposed himself so that I could deal with him. But he was always prolific with false information about me to Hitler. On the surface one would never believe he was a person who could direct such atrocities as he did. But there was only one occasion when I had reason to fear for my own life.

It came out of these circumstances- On April 20, Hitler sent word to me to go to Berchtesgaden as he would go there on the next night, the 21. I went there and on the morning of the twenty third my chief of staff Kohler arrived from Berlin and reported to me that Hitler on the previous night in Berlin had said that he considered the war was lost and he intended to stay in Berlin until final destruction. The suggestion was made to Hitler that one of the 15th Army facing the attack from the west ought to be used to assist in the south-eastern defenses. Hitler said: "All that needs to be done is to negotiate, and at that Goering is much better than I. I will leave that to Goering." But someone said, I think Bormann; "But people may not stick with him without you." Jodl knows this. Then Kohler told me that one hour later Hitler said to Eva Braun: "Get ready to die with me ~~tonight~~ tonight." Kohler then left.

All this occurred at Obersalzburg at my house. When I heard this report from Kohler, I did not know what had happened. As a matter of safety, I cabled Hitler instantly as follows: "Understand you have referred all decisions to me - can only make them if your order gives me freedom of action as required by the need of the moment by putting into effect the order of succession. I will take action at midnight unless I hear from you." In the meantime an army had been moved from the Elbe and was successful in halting the attack of the Russians from the south. As a result the depression of Hitler of the 22 had passed by the evening of the 23, and he was said to have been in high spirits.

It was my intention to negotiate for peace at once. Two hours after I sent the message by radio came this reply from Hitler- "I still ~~love~~ <sup>want</sup> freedom of action- I forbid you to surrender to the enemy".

At 6 o'clock on the evening of the 23, a cable came to the SS signed by Bormann, ordering my arrest. The SS surrounded the house and placed me under arrest. After an allied bombing attack the entire group of mine with the SS moved to my estate in Austria.

The next morning a cable arrived from Hitler- "Your attitude indicates treason against my person and against the National Socialist State and therefore deserves death. In view of your previous service I give you the opportunity to resign from all your positions."

I did nothing- four or five days later another cable- "In view of Goering treason against my person and the Party when crisis reaches climax in Berlin, Goering and his entire entourage will be executed." ( By order of the Fuehrer, signed Bormann).

That signature of Bormann saved my life. SS hesitated on whether it was Hitlers order so I was left alive altho closely guarded.

Two days later I was out in the gardens of the estate under the guard of 20 or 30 SS men when a convoy of trucks returning from the Italian front, passed on the road, and saw me. There was a whistle- the trucks stopped- the men jumped out- the fences were crushed down and I was rescued.

Often I could not help but consider the power of Hitler as evidence by this episode. Here he was surrounded by the enemy in Berlin. He could not get out. Yet by a mere radiogram he had the power to kill his successor, if his own name had been signed.