

HITLER'S TROJAN HORSE :

THE SECRET MISSIONS OF OTTO SKORZENY

by

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The compound was illuminated by the electric glare of spotlights in the vast summer night. Scuffle-helmeted guards patrolled with shepherd dog, frequently crunching their way across gravel paths, the bright silver of their runic SS collar patches reflecting in the glare against their black uniforms. Beyond the barbed wire and the "Achtung! Wachen!" placards which marked the outposts of the "Wolfstrosse" could be seen the dark outlines of FIR trees, stretching off into the distance of the surrounding plains and sending their scant to mingle with other oaks in the night breeze. In the stark black and white contrast of light and shadow one building stood out: a ghostly, windowless mass of concrete, known to residents of the compound

Part One:

"To the gallant victor!". With walls sixteen feet thick, this vast gray apertures emitted no sound and gave no clue that it was the focal point for co-ordination of the Nazi war effort. Only the constant flow of high-ranking officers in and out of its single door alerted the sentries that this night was a busy one for the inhabitants of Adolf Hitler's forest headquarters in Rastenburg, East Prussia.

Inside the massive bunker, the bustling atmosphere was a far cry from the calmness of the night enjoyed by the guards. Harsh, unshaded lights illuminated its busy corridors, which were filled with officers in the field grey-green of the Wehrmacht, carrying teletype carbons from one office to another. Occasionally, a staff officer with the red-striped trousers of the High Command would enter a room at the end of the central corridor, quietly closing the massive steel doors behind him.



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Inside, the room was virtually barren. A long oaken table, surrounded by plain wooden chairs, was the only major piece of furniture. Maps strewn on its surface showing the disposition of German forces added the room's only color. Hitler, in a move designed to bolster public morale, had moved his headquarters to this room in 1941, in order to be "near his troops" fighting in Russia. The ruse of being "somewhere on the Eastern Front" had done wonders to quiet whispers that the dictator did not care to share in his troops' danger. Actually, the Rastenburg compound was well behind the lines, so the Führer had nothing to fear.

Since 9:30 Hitler had been listening in this room with growing annoyance and frustration to this second military briefing of the day. The first, which had concluded at 2:12 that afternoon, had brought him rumors that something unusual was happening in Italy. Benito Mussolini, according to the German ambassador to Italy, von Mackensen, had been called before the Italian Fascist Grand Council in Rome early that morning. It was rumored that he had been carted off under arrest and that a pro-peace government under the leadership of Marshal Pietro Badoglio had taken over.

Now, as the dictator sat surveying the military commanders standing around him at the table, he was still as much in the dark about Italy as ever. Present in the "Tomb" were Generals Bodenschatz and Christian of the Luftwaffe; Buhle, Zeitzler, and Keitel of the Wehrmacht; Captain Karl von Puttkamer, his Naval aide; Albert Speer, the architect turned Minister of Armaments; and Otto Günsche, his six feet, five inches SS adjutant. Directly opposite the Führer, on the other side of the long table, was Lt. General Alfred Jodl, the slight, balding Chief of Operations for the OKW (Army High Command). All the men were

members of Hitler's personal military staff and their sole presence in the briefing room was evidence of the "Eastern Front" headquarters' main disadvantage: it was so isolated and so hard to reach that few active, knowledgeable officers could leave their front line posts to report directly on developments. None of the men present had been able to tell Hitler anything beyond what the impersonal teletypes in the outer offices supplied.

So, as the men strained to unravel the web of rumors and counter-rumors coming out of Rome, the German dictator was disposed to fear the worst. He was certain that Mussolini had been ousted, that Badoglio was a traitor, and that urgent steps must be taken immediately to prevent the loss of Italy.

Now he demanded of Jodl, "I want the 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division to drive into Rome and arrest the whole government--the King--all that scum! But principally Badoglio and the whole gang. How far is 3rd Panzer from Rome?"

Jodl, well aware of the inadequacy of their information and convinced that premature action could only produce results which might be regretted later, hastily glanced at a map and exaggerated the distance. "About a 100 kilometers, mein Führer."

Hitler, sensing something amiss, jerked the map towards him and examined it closely. After a moment he finally glared up at his aristocratic Chief of Operations. "That's no distance! One Hundred! Sixty kilometers!...Jodl, work out the orders. I want the Crown Prince above all."

Jodl, looking around at the others for support, suggested, "We really ought to wait for exact reports about what is going on." Hitler, exhibiting one of his last moments of calmness in the war, glanced at the others in the room. They were all nodding their heads in agreement. He decided to end the confer-

ence at that point and reconvene at 10:30 the next morning. It was July 25, 1943.

## II

As Hitler and his aides left their Rastenburg meeting room, another officer of Nazi Germany was preparing for bed. Several hundred miles away, in the Berlin suburb of Oranienburg, Otto Skorzeny, a captain in the Waffen SS, turned away from a window overlooking the parade ground of his headquarters in an old abandoned castle at Freidenthal. His men called him the "scar-faced giant", for at six feet four and 230 pounds, with a dueling scar from his student days running from his left eyebrow to his chin, Skorzeny presented a figure guaranteed to awe even the toughest veteran.

It had been a frustrating day for the towering captain. As commander of the newly formed Group VI S of the Reich Central Security Department, he was responsible for organizing a school of spying and sabotage. His students would be, eventually, Germany's only trained commandos. On April 20, he had been appointed "Chief of Germany's Special Troops, Existing or To Be Created in the Future." Now the grandiose title was proving to have its drawbacks. At every turn he seemed to meet opposition to his efforts. Even the wood necessary to build barracks for his trainees had been delayed by red tape. Skorzeny was convinced that old-fashioned officers on the General Staff were to blame for his troubles. Bitterly, he reflected that precedent seemed to be the key to success for any novel military concept. And "commandos", he knew, were certainly the newest idea in this already novel war.



Skorzeny's military career up to this July night had not been radically different from that of any other officer in the Waffen SS. The outbreak of war in 1939 had found him as an engineering graduate from the University of Vienna working for a prosperous building firm in which he held half-ownership. Although he held membership in the Austrian Nazi Party, he was not enough of a Hitlerite fanatic to join the regular SS under Heinrich Himmler. Instead, hoping to avoid the boredom of Army life, he had joined the Luftwaffe and applied for pilot training. His application had been rejected. At 31, he was too old to fly, and so was assigned to a dreary communications post in his native Vienna. Frustrated and not a little embarrassed to see all his friends go off to the action, he had turned to the Waffen SS, the military branch of the regular SS, but without the political overtones of the parent Himmler organization.

His transfer was approved on February 21, 1940, and later that week he was assigned to the much-decorated Liebenstarde Adolf Hitler Regiment in Berlin as an artillery officer cadet. Six months in France and two years in Russia had seasoned him considerably and left him with an abiding respect for Soviet resourcefulness and guerilla tactics. When he was invalided home in 1942, he had the Iron Cross first class and a severe case of dysentery. He was immediately assigned as an engineering officer to the 3rd SS Panzer Division, but the dysentery came back to haunt him and he was forced to leave that post in February of 1943. Sent back to Berlin as a supply officer, he ran into an old friend from college days who was a junior officer on the General Staff. He told Skorzeny, who was dying of boredom in his new job, that there might be a place for him with a new commando unit that Hitler had ordered to be formed.

He applied for the job and was quickly made the unit's commander because of his combat experience.

Now, sitting on the edge of his bed, Skorzeny pondered what steps he should take to get his new commando school going. He had less than a company under his command; just himself, three other officers and fifty men, with very little in the way of tangible support from higher headquarters. Commando training, it seemed, had just been another passing fancy of the Führer. The day before he had tried to convince some general staff officers to push for production of light machine gun of the type carried by British commandos. He had shown them the effectiveness of a captured Sten gun, but the officers had scoffed at its short range. "The Führer has ordered that the German soldier be equipped with the finest of weapons in all respects. 'In all respects' includes range, captain."

Running a hand through his glossy black hair, Skorzeny reflected that the only way to get anything accomplished was to go directly to Hitler with his requests. But what chance would a mere captain have of meeting Germany's leader? Yawning, Skorzeny stretched out on his bed. As with everything he had ever been issued in the service, it was too small for him. Soon the "giant" of Freidenthal was asleep.

### III

While Skorzeny slept, the officers and men of Hitler's Rastenburg bunker were compiling the newest reports from Italy. The Führer's fears had been proven correct. The Fascist Grand Council had that morning voted for the ouster of Mussolini by a margin of 19 to 8. Summoned before Italy's king,



Victor Emmanuel, the Duce had been dismissed from office. As he left the palace he had been arrested by agents of Marshal Badoglio and driven away, his destination unknown to any of the Germans in Rome. The new government, although it had promised to remain in the war, almost certainly would not.

Confirmation of the earlier rumors, although expected, still came as a profound shock to the Führer. Mussolini was his closest friend, the one man with whom he felt secure in discussing the trials and agonies of leadership. Although Hitler had no respect for the Italians as a race, looking on them as inferior, his admiration for Mussolini in being able to master, guide, and discipline them was enormous. He had last met with Mussolini less than a week before, on July 19, and they had discussed in detail the current anti-war feelings in Italy since the invasion of Sicily by the allies on the 10th. The Italian people longed for peace, Mussolini had told him. But the Italian dictator had assured him of Italy's continuing support in the war.

Now, Italy seemed lost. The 12:30 a.m. conference had found Hitler grasping at straws for some method of restoring the Duce to power. He continued his threats to "drive into Rome" and arrest the government. Finally, realizing that no decisive action could be taken without the counsel of his major advisors, none of whom were in Rastenburg, Hitler had spent the rest of the early morning hours phoning throughout Germany to assemble the leaders of the Reich.

By noon of the 25th most of the men had arrived. Present now in addition to the regulars, Jodl, Keitel, and Speer, were Luftwaffe commander Hermann Goering, SS leader Heinrich Himmler, Navy chief Karl Dönitz, and the legendary "Desert Fox", Erwin Rommel, who had been briefed as early as May 15 to be ready to take over command in Italy should the Mussolini government collapse.

Hitler greeted them with four plans he had conceived since calling them to Rastenburg: (1) Operation Eiche (Oak), providing for the rescue of Mussolini by the Navy if he were found on an island, or by Luftwaffe parachutists if he were located on the mainland; (2) Operation Student (after paratroop general Kurt Student) calling for the occupation of Rome and the restoration of the Mussolini government; (3) Operation Schwarz (Black) for the occupation of all Italy; and (4) Operation Achse (Axis) for the capture or destruction of the Italian fleet.

To the first of the plans, the rescue of Mussolini, there was no real opposition, although Rommel was later to confide to his wife, "I can see no good in it." The rest, which all dealt in some form or another with the use of force to break the back of the new Italian government, were received with strong objections, especially by Dönitz and Jodl. Asked for their candid opinion, the two men showed an unusual frankness.

Dönitz told the Führer, "I doubt whether Fascism still means anything either to those who favor continuing the war on our side or to the Italian people themselves. We must forestall, by all means, any surprise action by the Anglo-Saxons, but I believe there is still time and that it can be used by us to strengthen our position in Italy by bringing in more divisions. As the situation develops we may find a better propagandist approach against the present government."

Jodl, echoing the Admiral's sentiments said, "I doubt seriously whether Fascism will be revived. I recommend refraining from any action against the government. We should, instead, merely reinforce our troops in Italy." Then, as an afterthought, Jodl blurted out, "Come to think of it, Fascism simply

burst like a soap bubble." According to Speer, "a horrified silence followed" until someone hurriedly changed the subject. Jodl flushed beet red.

Seeing that the consensus of opinion was stacked against him, Hitler toned down his demands for a quick occupation of Italy, but warned that "if we delay we run the danger of losing Italy to the Anglo-Saxons." Then, after a moment's pause, he continued with an obvious dig at Jodl, "These are matters which a soldier cannot comprehend. Only a man with political insight can see clearly..."

For Hitler, the physical presence of Mussolini was the key to the solution of the current problem in Italy. As the leader of Italian fascism for over twenty years there wasn't much hope for a fascist revival in Italy without him. The Führer was sure that if Mussolini could be rescued and restored as Duce, the coalition of Victor Emmanuel and Badoglio would fall apart. So, while agreeing to hold off on immediate military action in Italy, he still cherished hopes that his friend's hiding place could be found and the "operation Oak" plan implemented.

When the noon conference broke up at 2:00, Jodl and the others gratefully poured out of the stifling concrete bunker into the cool air of Rastenburg. Himmler stayed behind, and when the others were outside the little bespectacled man approached Hitler. "I think the SS can supply the troops needed for the rescue of the Duce." Hitler listened, intrigued. "The Reich Security Department has been training commandos now for some time for just such a task." Himmler did not mention that it was an order by Hitler which had established the commandos, and apparently the Führer had now forgotten. "Their commander is a good man, a veteran of the Russian Front. I have myself entrusted him with several missions and he has carried them off with great success. I can

have him flown here this afternoon if you wish." Hitler was delighted. "Of course! Send for him straghtaway!"

Himmler was exaggerating. He had never met Skorzeny. The "several missions" he spoke of were, in reality, only one, and that was a ridiculous assignment to blow up Russian fuel supplies deep in the Ukraine which the thirty five year old captain had already labeled 'impossible'. The SS Reichsführer was taking a calculated risk. There was an intense rivalry between the SS and the other services. If an SS unit could effect the rescue of Mussolini it would be a great plus for Himmler. If the unit failed, then he could always avoid responsibility by claiming Skorzeny's men at Freidenthal hadn't had adequate preparation for such an important assignment. In this he would have been correct.

#### IV

For Otto Skorzeny, July 26 had been a rather pleasant day. Changing into civilian dress that morning, he had walking through Berlin, seeing the sights which were still a novelty to a Viennese who had only been in the city a few months. In front of the Eden Hotel he had run into one of his old professors from Vienna, and the two men enjoyed a leisurely lunch in the hotel's restaurant. Afterwards, they lingered at their table over the ersatz coffee Berliners were now forced to accept. Soon the professor began to question his old student about his present activities, and Skorzeny traced for him the background of Germany's new commandos. It had all begun, said Skorzeny, with the Dieppe invasion by Canadian and English commandos in 1942. This small force, although quickly crushed by superior German forces, had demonstrated to the Führer the

practicality of small squads for special missions. Another commando effort, an attack by members of the English Long Range Desert Group against the headquarters of Fieldmarshal Rommel, had also impressed Hitler. Although the High Command had issued an order on October 12 over Hitler's signature condemning commandos as "brutal and treacherous," it was soon common knowledge among the General Staff that the Führer would like such a unit for his own. Hint after hint circulated until SS Colonel Walther Schellenberg, Chief of Political Information, had suggested to Himmler that the SS volunteer for such duty. Himmler had done so and now Schellenberg was Skorzeny's immediate superior. So far, though, shrugged the massive Austrian, his group had never been used.

Glancing at his watch, Skorzeny noticed it was after three o'clock, and that he had neglected to make a routine "check-in" call to his headquarters. Excusing himself for a moment to the professor, he pushed back his chair and went in search of a phone he could use. Finding one, he dialed his Friendenthal extension, and within moments found himself talking to his second in command, Lieutenant Karl Radl. Radl, an amiable, rather dumpy young man, was beside himself with excitement.

"Sir, where have you been?! We've been looking all over for you for two hours! You're wanted urgently at the Führer's headquarters. A teletype came in for you earlier this afternoon from the Reichsführer. There's a plane for you at Templehof now."

Skorzeny's head was spinning. Hitler's headquarters? Teletype? Airplane? What did all this mean? "Sir? Are you still there?"



"Yes, I'm here. Radl, meet me at Templehof with a change of clothes. I'm leaving now."

Hurrying back to his table, Skorzeny apologized to his old professor. "Something urgent has come up." With that, he turned and half walked, half ran for the door, leaving the old man sitting, staring confusedly after him.

Flagging down a taxi, Skorzeny told the driver to take him to Templehof, "the military entrance." Twenty minutes later, he was met by Radl on the oil-stained runway in front of a long line of Folke-Wulf's, Junker 52's, and Heinkel's. Radl was carrying a change of uniform for his chief, and while the huge Austrian was doffing his civilian jacket and trousers in a nearby men's room, his plump aide gave him a summary of the warfront bulletins. There was some change of government in Italy. No, he didn't know how serious or if it had anything to do with his urgent summons. Promising to call him the first chance he got, the commando leader boarded one of the waiting Heinkel's. Standing in the plane's doorway, he yelled down, "Tell the men to stand by. We might need them."

Skorzeny sat down and fastened the seat belt of one of the steel bolted chairs in the plane's fuselage. Looking down the aisle, he noticed with shock that he was the plane's only passenger. What a mad course of affairs! Surely there would be others coming aboard. But before he could inquire, the Heinkel's engines started and the plane was rolling down the tarmac. He reconciled himself to luxury. Soon the plane was airborne, its sole cargo a very confused captain. Skorzeny settled back for the long journey to Rastenburg. On the way a million thoughts passed through his head. Curiosity fought with slight stirrings of ambition and finally won. Could this have something to do with



those Russian fuel dumps? He hoped not. Finally he gave up and reached for the liquor rack he had spotted above his head. Luxury indeed.

The plane landed on an airstrip adjacent to the Führer's headquarters. It was now 8:30 in the evening, and the first person to approach the debarking Skorzeny through the gloom was a major dressed in the uniform of a general staff officer. Friendly, but offering no explanations to the confused Austrian, he led him to a waiting staff car and in minutes they had pulled to a stop in front of a low-slung, important-looking house, guarded by omnipresent SS sentries. Ushered into a large, dimly-lit room with expensive furnishings, Skorzeny was told to wait. In a few moments the major returned. "The Führer will see you now." This was more than Skorzeny had bargained for. The chances of a captain to see Germany's dictator were as remote as winning some huge fortune in a sweepstakes. His legs felt weak.

The big Austrian was guided through massive doors into a room larger and even more luxuriously decorated than the first. It was empty, but soon from a side door emerged Hitler. The dictator was dressed in his usual garb of black trousers and grey, double-breasted military jacket. An Iron Cross gleamed dully from his pocket. "Skorzeny?" "Yes, my Führer." "Sit down, my boy, sit down." Hitler eased himself down into a red-leather chair opposite Skorzeny. He looked tired.

"Captain, I suppose you have no idea why you are here?"

"No, my Führer." To Skorzeny it was all a dream.

"I have a very important commission for you. Mussolini, my friend and our loyal comrade in arms, was betrayed yesterday by his king and arrested by his own countrymen. I cannot and will not leave Italy's greatest son in the

lurch. To me the Duce is the incarnation of the ancient grandeur of Rome. Italy under the new government will desert us!" Suddenly, Hitler rose, his eyes alight. "I will keep faith with my old ally and dear friend; he must be rescued promptly or he will be handed over to the Allies. You, captain, will rescue my friend."

Skorzeny was flabbergasted. Besides the import of the news of the Duce's ouster, a blow to anyone who believed in the solidarity of the Axis, now he, a junior captain, was being asked by the Führer to bring him out of captivity.

His shock must have showed, for Hitler realized he had been a little too sudden for the giant in front of him. Sitting again, the dictator asked Skorzeny about his background. Delighted to find a fellow Austrian, soon the two were conversing warmly, Skorzeny's shyness gone. The Führer briefed him on the current trends in Italy and insisted that his mission must remain a secret, even to the top commanders in Italy. Then, as if realizing the importance of his own time, Hitler stood up again. Reminding Skorzeny that Mussolini's whereabouts were unknown, the dictator sent him off to the offices of General Kurt Student. As he was leaving, Skorzeny turned to look back at his leader. "Remember, captain, this is a mission for which you will be answerable to me personally!"

Skorzeny found the gruff, portly paratroop general in an office just outside Hitler's waiting room. Across his brow was a bullet scar received at Rotterdam. Hardly had they met when Himmler walked in. The SS commander lectured them for thirty minutes, most of it useless political jargon. Then, as suddenly as he had appeared, the little man left, tossing one final reminder. "All this is secret, you know." The two men looked at each other, bemused.

Student had ordered the day before to fly to Rome as soon as a man could be selected to go with him to search for the Duce. Now that Skorzeny had been picked, the two men spent the next several hours, late into the night, discussing what possibilities lay before them. Once, Skorzeny excused himself to call the waiting Radl. He told his second in command to pick their best men and he would meet them in Rome. When asked what equipment to bring, Skorzeny said, "Bring everything. Tropical uniforms, portable radios, tracer ammunition, false identity cards, Italian currency...everything!" At 1 a.m. he stumbled off to bed in quarters provided him in the SS barracks nearby. Early the next morning he was awakened by one of the guards and soon found himself sitting next to Student on the plane which would take them to Rome to confer with the German commander in the Mediterranean, Field Marshal Kesselring. It was 8 a.m., July 27.

## V

Benito Mussolini, the object of Skorzeny's quest, was also making a journey on July 27. Spirited off to the Italian naval base at Gaeta after his arrest on July 25, the dictator had requested Badoglio to let him be exiled to his own home at La Rocca delle Caminate, but his request had been turned down. On July 26 the new government's Council of Ministers, acting on the advice of the Prefect of Forlì, had decided a safer place for Mussolini would be on the island of Ponza off Naples. To this penal colony which he had himself established for his political enemies, the Duce was transferred on the morning of the 27th.

## VI

Skorzeny and Student arrived in Rome late in the afternoon of July 27 and went immediately to the headquarters of Field Marshal Kesselring in the cool Frascati hills above the city. They arrived just in time for dinner: clear soup, salami and gherkins, and beer. Also at the table were Kesselring's chief of staff, Major General Siegfried Westphal, Standartenführer Eugen Dollmann (SS Colonel), Himmler's personal representative in Italy, and SS Lt. Colonel Herbert Kappler, the German embassy's police attache. Following the simple meal, the generals retired to a lounge for coffee, leaving Skorzeny, Dollmann, and Kappler alone.

The two men were eyeing Skorzeny with obvious curiosity. Dressed in a Luftwaffe flight jacket so as to be taken for General Student's aide, the towering Austrian was sweating like a horse, cutting a strange figure indeed in the warm Italian evening. Dollmann was not fooled by the ruse, and was sure Skorzeny represented someone from the State Security Bureau. Almost immediately, Skorzeny proved him correct. Turning to Dollmann, a slight, intellectual-looking man, and Kappler, a cool, blue-eyed policeman, Skorzeny said, "In the name of the Führer I must ask you to promise that what follows will be treated as top secret."

Both men nodded and leaned forward eagerly in their chairs. For an officer so young as Skorzeny to have been closeted with the Führer was a sign of the importance of his mission. The Austrian explained what had occurred to him the day before, briefing them not only on Hitler's order to him, but also on his background and the school at Freidenthal. He admitted his lack of experience in "this sort of thing" and stressed the need for their co-operation

if his mission was to be successful. When he finished, both men asked almost simultaneously if Field Marshal Kesselring had been told of his mission. "No," said Skorzeny, and then gave the reasoning behind the decision.

"The Field Marshal is a soldier of the old school. He would probably not approve of this mission. Also, he believes that the new government will stay in the war on German's side, despite the Allies' landing in Sicily. The Führer himself told me yesterday that he does not believe this will be the case. He feels that Marshal Badoglio will use the Duce as a pawn to negotiate an end to the war with the Allies. The only reason for not taking direct military action at this time is to increase the chances of Italian co-operation in our search." The two men debated the wisdom of this course of action with Skorzeny, but the big Austrian with the scarred face had become as so many others before him an irrevocable supporter of the Führer in just the short time he had spent with him the day before. After a while the two gave in to Skorzeny's arguments. Kappler and Dollmann agreed to help in any way they could, but Kappler warned of the difficulties which would lie ahead.

"Until February of this year there was no German Secret Service in Italy, by direct order of the Führer. Then, your chief Schellenberg assigned a Lt. Colonel Höttil to work with me. We've been trying to convince Berlin that the Duce was sure to be overthrown for some months, but no one would listen to us. Now, my contacts have been getting better recently, but still I don't know if we can make up for the loss of years. Finding Mussolini might be an insuperable task."

Skorzeny was amazed that such a situation existed. But, once again, he reminded the men of Hitler's explicit orders to him. The job was going to be a lot harder than he had thought.



Just as the men finished talking, Student, Kesselring, and Westphal emerged from the lounge. Thanking the Fieldmarshal for a delightful evening, Student and Skorzeny took their leave of Kesselring and his other guests and walked outside to a waiting staff car. As they drove into Rome, Student turned to the commando. "Well?" he inquired. "It will be difficult," said Skorzeny.

The next day, Skorzeny was re-united with his faithful aide Radl. The young lieutenant had pulled every string he could to get all the equipment his boss had requested, finally resorting to the powerful "Führerbefehl" or Führer Order. The men, he told Skorzeny, were dying of curiosity. Unable to tell them their destination because of security regulations, the codewords he had distributed had given them a clue: "The macaroni's burning." Laughing, Skorzeny asked how their flight had gone. "Everything went fine. We trucked out to Staaken field at seven yesterday morning. I know we must have looked strange to all the civilians out there, bundled up and loaded down as we were. We flew down in JU 52 transports. Stopped once in France to refuel." Skorzeny briefed him on what had transpired so far and the two ate a quick breakfast together. Afterwards they began the long process of gathering clues to Mussolini's hiding place.

It was to be a frustrating process. During their first few days in the Italian capital neither Skorzeny nor Radl could discover anything about the Duce's destination after his arrest. Day followed sunny day, with the commando leaders tracing down each and every lead under the watchful eyes of Dollmann and Kappler. Eight hour cigarette and coffee sessions concluded their evenings, with their meals being served to them on trays. The men sifted through the



the same sort of rumor and counter-rumor which had plagued Hitler's headquarters a week before. Mussolini was dead, said one report. Another said he was disguised as a humble blackshirt on the Sicilian front. Often Skorzeny wondered if his first important mission would end in disgrace. The Badoglio government, quite rightly fearing a German attempt to rescue the Duce before he could be used as a valuable negotiating tool with the Allies, was spreading false reports everywhere.

Hitler was growing anxious, too. German reinforcements were pouring into the country. Three divisions, the soldiers' helmets daubed "Long Live Mussolini" had been added to the already impressive German strength of eight divisions in Italy. On July 29, 10,000 paratroops of Student's 11th Air Corps had landed at Rome's Pratica di Mare airfield. Unless some clue to Mussolini's whereabouts came soon, the plan to seize the government of Italy might become reality.

The first real clue came on August 3, when Admiral Dönitz relayed a message to Skorzeny that he had received from the German naval base at Gaeta. Two of his men, a lieutenant named Desauer and a signalman named Laurich, had seen Mussolini placed on board a corvette at the docks shared by the Germans with the Italian naval station nearby. From an Italian officer they had learned that the ship's destination was Ponza. The astonished Laurich, who had seen the transfer in greater detail than the lieutenant, was whisked off to Rastenburg to repeat his story to the Führer. He was positive the man he had seen was Mussolini. Patting him on the shoulder and saying, "Well done, my boy," Hitler had pinned the Iron Cross on the sailor's jersey. The Secret Service had followed up the lead and had discovered other evidence pointing to the

Duce's prison as being on Ponza. Elated, Skorzeny gave Radl a bear hug which nearly crushed the smaller man. "Now we've got him!" Quickly, planning began as to the best means of assaulting the island.

## VII

But on Ponza Mussolini was being told to gather up his scant belongings. The Badoglio government, aware through some leak how close the Germans were coming to the Duce's hiding place, had decided to move him again. On August 6, while Skorzeny was deep in the stages of final planning, Mussolini was taken to La Maddalena, a fortified port three miles off Sardinia. Sailing across the bright blue waters in the early morning sun, Mussolini had been incensed at his constant relocation. He turned angrily to his escort, Admiral Maugeri, "This is the greatest humiliation which could be inflicted on me. Do they really think that I might go off to Germany and try to seize the reins again with German aid? Ah no, I should think not." The Duce was a broken man, and he believed that the new Italian government should just leave him alone now that he was out of office. His possibilities for rescue were so remote that he had resigned himself to the role of a political nonentity. His supporters had either vanished or been thrown into jail by Badoglio. As long as he could live some semblance of a peaceful life he was content. Future events would make him hope fervently for rescue, but for the moment he just didn't care any more.

## VIII

Skorzeny received word on August 7 that Mussolini had been moved. For him and his staff it was a great disappointment. He had been pouring over his maps in his quarters when one of Kappler's liason men had walked in. "You won't need those now, I'm afraid." Skorzeny had looked at him as if he were crazy. "What the hell are you talking about?" demanded the big Austrian. Then the man had told him that Mussolini had definitely been moved. Witnesses were available, he said. No, no one knew where he had gone. Local representatives of the German Secret Service had checked the island thoroughly. Mussolini was gone, and Skorzeny was back where he had started two weeks before.

## IX

While at La Maddalena, Mussolini was allowed to receive mail from his family and close friends. One day he received a gift from Hitler, a complete set of the works of Nietzsche passed on by the Badoglio government. The Führer was showing his friend that German minds were still concentrating on him. Mussolini was pleased, but still saw no reason for the Germans to rescue him. He was, he thought, politically useless. While the fall from power was a long one for him, he was daily getting more and more used to a quiet life. On July 29 he had turned sixty and now he thought only of enjoying his remaining years in peaceful retirement. He still could not see that he was an extremely useful political pawn to both sides.

A letter which did not reach Mussolini came from his daughter, the Countess

Ciano. Addressed to the Duce at La Maddalena, the letter was intercepted by police attache Kappler on August 16 and passed immediately to Skorzeny.

## X

Skorzeny was eager to prove the authenticity of the letter's address. Plus, on the same day he received the letter, he had also received additional information about La Maddalena. Captain Hunäus, the gouty old German Harbor Commandant on the island, had reported that the Italian garrison there had been suddenly strengthened, especially around the Villa Weber, residence of the Italian commander.

So it was that a morning in the last week of August found two German sailors strolling up a rocky path on the island towards a launderess' house on a hill overlooking the Villa. To any casual observer in the sleepy community, one of the men was familiar as the hard-drinking, quick betting orderly and interpreter to Captain Hunäus. His larger companion was probably just a rating from the German naval station. Only Karl Radl and his men would have recognized Otto Skorzeny and a young 2nd lieutenant named Robert Warger.

Warger, an ex-Tyrolean mountaineer and, until a week before, a fanatic teetotaler, was a member of Skorzeny's Freidenthal formation who spoke excellent Italian. After hearing Hunäus' report of new activity on the island, Skorzeny had told him to establish himself on La Maddalena as Hunäus' interpreter and to make the rounds of the village's bars. Skorzeny was a definite believer in bars as sources of information. Warger had agreed readily to the interpreter's post, but had recoiled at the idea of drinking his way to the Duce's

prison. "I just can't, you know." Skorzeny and Radl had lured him into their Frascati quarters, Radl constantly reminding him, "Who ever heard of a teetotalling sailor?" With wine and cognac, the two commando leaders initiated Warger into the drinking fraternity. As he choked and gagged over the first few drinks, they had chided him, "My dear friend, it's not as bad as you think." On August 17, Warger went to La Maddelena.

Their hard work had paid off. Two days after arriving on the island, Warger had bet a local citizen a bottle of cognac that Mussolini was dead. Pleased at finding a man so willing to part with his money, the man had led Warger to a house nearby. Pointing wordlessly to the narrow terrace of the Villa Weber, he had shown Warger Benito Mussolini himself, sitting in a wooden chair and staring at the sea. He relayed the sighting to Skorzeny, who immediately began planning a large-scale assault on the island.

Now, eight days later as the two sailors climbed the hill, Otto Skorzeny noted carefully the terrain around the Villa. But the view wasn't very good from this angle. To see the Villa more clearly he would have to go another fifty yards beyond the launderess' house. As an excuse to do so he planned to fall back on his dysentery when they reached the house and inquire for a toilet. The launderess could not be expected to have one, and so Warger would, on cue, tell him about a rockslide farther up the path.

When they reached the house, all went as planned. Asking the woman for a toilet and complaining about his "damned Dysentery," she had shamefacedly admitted that her home was too poor to afford such a luxury. Warger piped in, "There's a rockslide fifty yards up the road. I'll wait for you here." Skorzeny disappeared.



When he arrived at the designated piled rocks, Skorzeny crouched down. Below him lay the Villa Weber. Its tan colored stone walls were covered with sculptured eagles and lions, interspaced with bright splashes of bougainvillea. There was no sign of Mussolini, even though the terrace was bathed in sunlight. Skorzeny stared, puzzled for a moment. Couldn't the Duce even sit on his own terrace? Then the answer struck him: it must be time for Mussolini's siesta he had heard so much about. The dictator had recently taken to noonday naps to restore his strength. A natural thing, thought Skorzeny, for a sixty year old man.

Although Musolini wasn't on the terrace, about twenty of his carabinieri guards were, soaking up the sun. Reassured, Skorzeny hurried back to join Warger. He found his young compatriot talking with one of the guards on the road. Joining in the conversation, Skorzeny began praising all things Italian - the girls, the sunshine, the wine. Then Warger interjected, "It's such a pity about the Duce." Looking at him curiously, the guard asked what he had heard. Warger said, "It was on the German radio this morning. He died of fever last night." With contempt, the carabinieri dismissed the report as false. Then Skorzeny broke in, "I'm sure it's true. I got all the details from a doctor friend of mine." Now the guard was more insistent. "No, No, my friend. It's impossible. I was a member of the Duce's escort this morning. I saw him with my own eyes. We led him to the white rescue plane with the red cross and I saw it take him away."

Skorzeny whirled around. The bay lay at his feet, its blue waters glinting in the sun. But the Red Cross rescue plane which he had seen anchored off the coast for the past week was gone. And so was Mussolini. Skorzeny grabbed Warger's arm and ran down the path, leaving a very confused Italian staring after them.



For the commando leader it was the bitterest blow of all. Once again, the wily Italians had fooled them. The massive attack which Skorzeny had been planning every since Warger's first report had to be cancelled. For the big Austrian it had been a near disaster, for at six a.m. the next morning German E-boats, minesweepers, and troops of his own and a neighboring SS unit were to dash into the harbor and carry Mussolini away. Hitler himself had approved the plan as relayed to him by Admiral Dönitz. Skorzeny could not afford to miss again. It was August 27.

## XI

Mussolini's removal from La Maddalena, as in the Ponza episode, traced its way back to German activity. On August 18, the day after sending Warger to the island, Skorzeny had decided that it might be well to have air reconnaissance photos of the island just in case something turned up. Unfortunately, one of the plane's engines had failed, forcing it to fly at a lower altitude than was prudent for such a sensitive task. The Italians had been alarmed by the low-flying German aircraft, and even Mussolini, who had by this time become accustomed to his guards' sensitivity, expected to be forced to move again.

This time his captors flew him in an ambulance plane to the Italian sea-plane base on Lake Bracciano, where he was met by a carabinieri officer and a police inspector named Gueli. They drove him in a military ambulance towards a ski lodge on the Gran Sasso in the Apennine Mountain range, the "Campo Imperatore."

Located in the high peaks of the Gran Sasso, the lodge was reachable only

by a funicular, or cable car, from a valley far below. Mussolini, confronted with this sole transport to his prison, remarked, "Is the funicular safe? Not for my sake, because my life is over, but for those who accompany me." Assured of its reliability, Mussolini and his escorts were soon comfortably ensconced in the new hiding place, 7000 feet above sea level.

## XII

Skorzeny spent the days after the near-disaster of La Maddelena tracking down every known clue to Mussolini's new whereabouts. But the search was a frustrating one, producing nothing. There were lighter moments, however, especially when word came from Berlin that Himmler had enlisted the aid of astrologers to pinpoint the Duce. During the long evening sessions with Kappler, Radl, and Dollmann, the men howled uproariously as word came from the SS leader that Mussolini was variously aboard the Italian battleship "Italia," in a convent hospital at Santa Maria, or "somewhere in Sardinia."

The first real clue came on September 1 when General Student, in an effort to trace the Red Cross seaplane, contacted the commander of a German seaplane base on the same Lake Bracciano where Mussolini had landed four days before. The commander had indeed seen the Red Cross plane...and Mussolini. Ignorant of the rescue plan, as were all but a few of the top German commanders, he had seen no reason to report the sighting. All he could tell Student was that Mussolini had been placed in an ambulance, seemingly healthy, and had been driven off in a cloud of dust. He had no idea of the Duce's destination.

Then Kappler had an unexpected piece of good luck. One of his informants in the Police Ministry had gotten hold of a telegram delivered to Rome Police chief Carmine Senise. The sender of the telegram, an inspector named Gueli, was known to be Mussolini's "guard". The telegram said "SECURITY MEASURES AROUND GRAN SASSO COMPLETED."

But where on the Gran Sasso could Mussolini be kept? It was one of Italy's highest peaks, in the Apennine Mountain range. Skorzeny and Kappler sent for maps, finally discovering a flat plateau rising 7000 feet above the valley floor and the village of Assergi. On it was built a ski lodge, the Campo Imperatore. It was a ghastly place to attempt a rescue. Skorzeny and Radl combed the city's tourist shops but could find no literature about the area. Curiously, all such pamphlets had disappeared from the shelves.

The next day, September 8, Skorzeny, Radl, and a Luftwaffe intelligence captain, Gerhard Langguth, flew over the area taking pictures in a Heinkel III bomber. This time the Italians were not so airplane conscious, probably because German bombers were a common sight after the invasion of Sicily. But the angle for taking photographs were bad and Radl and Skorzeny had to take turns leaning out of the aircraft's rear escape hatch, each holding the other's legs, to obtain even marginal views of Gran Sasso.

As the men flew back to the airfield at Pratica di Mare, another bit of hard luck awaited them. They landed during an Allied air raid on the base, for

the uneasy peace between Italy, Germany, and the Allied Forces since the Italian surrender to General Eisenhower on September 3 had been ended by the declaration by Italy of war against Germany while Skorzeny and Radl were airborne. Taxiing to a jerky stop while bombs fell around them, Skorzeny, Radl, and the pilot, Langguth, ran from the airplane and threw themselves in the nearest ditch. Radl, clutching their all important camera, yelled to Skorzeny over the roar of the bombs the password the Freidenthal unit had adopted recently, "Take it easy!" Skorzeny smiled back.

The bombing knocked out the airfield's photo lab, so the best pictures Skorzeny could obtain were 4x4 snapshot size prints, made up in a jury-rigged darkroom. The pictures came out worse than Skorzeny had feared. The ski lodge itself was but a smudgy quarter inch across. A possible landing site was spotted by keen-eyed intelligence officers, but even they were unsure of its size, angle, and surface characteristics. Shaky information to base an attack on at best.

Student, aware that any operation against the Gran Sasso would risk the lives of many of his paratroops and pilots, wanted to be absolutely sure that the ski lodge was indeed the hiding place of the Duce. Calling in a young Luftwaffe doctor, Leo Krutoff of the 11th Air Corps medical staff, Student ordered him to find a convalescent home for urgent malaria cases. "There's a

hotel on Gran Sasso you might check," Student had told him. "Whatever the circumstances, you must inspect it yourself. Don't let them turn you back." With that, the unsuspecting doctor had been sent out.

Krutoff reported back the next day with the information Student wanted to hear. "I went to the cable car station down in the valley but the carabinieri wouldn't let me ride up. He was very insistent. So I asked to speak to his commanding officer to explain why I was there. He rang the man up but never would let me talk to him. It was all very queer. After talking a while, he hung up and told me that if I didn't leave at once, he would arrest me. Imagine! I'm sorry about your convalescent home, sir. But I'm sure we can find some place else where the people are more co-operative."

Now, Student was sure that Mussolini was indeed in the Campo Imperatore. But how long would he stay there? The general remembered all too well the near catastrophe at La Maddalena. Could he ever be sure enough to commit his men to such a hazardous undertaking? With Italy now theoretically on the side of the Allies, a rescue was almost sure to be bloody.

It was now September 11 and each passing day brought increased danger that the Duce would soon be turned over to the Allies as part of the surrender agreement Italy had signed. Skorzeny had been briefing his men for days. The big, scar-faced commando leader had spent the better part of each day checking



equipment and tidying up the assault plan for Gran Sasso. As of 10 o'clock that morning the attack called for 12 glider-loads of men, distributed ten to a glider and divided up between Skorzeny's 50 commandos and 70 of Student's crack paratroopers. The gliders, all Gotha DFS 230's, were constructed of aluminum and cloth fiber. They would be available within four hours of their notification, the time required for them to be brought from a Luftwaffe base on the Riviera. All the troops would be heavily armed in anticipation of Italian troops which might outnumber them by 3 to 1. All that was needed was the green light from Student.

That afternoon Kappler and Radl were driving down the Piazza del Viminale when Kappler spotted an Italian dressed in civilian garb standing with a group of military officers. Pointing him out to Radl he said, "That's General Soletti of the Carabinieri." At once, Radl ribbed him, "Well, why don't you ask him where Mussolini is?" Kappler accepted the challenge. Pulling the car over to the curb, he got out and walked directly towards Soletti. Confronting the little man he asked him point blank: "Where is Mussolini?"

"I don't know." Kappler smiled at him. "You're a liar." There was a moment's shocked pause. "Well," Soletti fumbled, "I know where he was yesterday because I sent provisions up to the Hotel Imperatore." Nodding, Kappler turned away sharply and returned to the car. Pulling away, he told Radl what the

little general had said. Radl vowed, "I'll take that general to Gran Sasso - but this time in uniform."

The two men drove quickly to Pratica di Mare, where they informed Student and Skorzeny of what they had learned. Student was convinced. "Why would anyone stock up on provisions if they planned to leave soon?" Immediately he put in a call for the gliders. It was too late to launch the assault that day, but the men were told to be ready for an early morning takeoff. The mission would be launched the next day, Sunday, September 12.

That night Skorzeny addressed his small group for the last time before the combined troops would be briefed in the morning. Gathered in a small room at the edge of the airfield, Skorzeny looked with affection on his close-knit band. For him, tomorrow would be ended in disgrace or glory. Death was a possibility as well. But for his men Sunday would bring simple defeat or victory. They could hope for no great laurels, only the satisfaction of having done their duty. For over a month they had primed themselves time and again for action, only to see their assignments called off. For them the strain had been worse than for Skorzeny. He, at least, knew what was going on. But they had had to be content with the boredom of barracks' life, tuned to pitch but never called on to be played. The young faces staring eagerly at their commander reflected only desire to do what was required of them. Skorzeny, his bulk stuffed into

the light khaki of a paratroop officer, began, slowly, to speak:

Candidly, the experts don't give much for our chances. They expect us to lose most of our strength even before the fighting starts..." He paused. The faces stared at him intently. With a note of optimism in his voice which he hoped they wouldn't know was false, he continued, "I don't think it'll be as bad as all that, but some losses are to be expected. No one is ordered to take part. Anyone who wants to think twice about coming, or who has a family to consider, can drop out now. He will have nothing to fear. His refusal will not be known outside our ranks nor be put into any record, and we shall respect him no less."

He needn't have asked. No one dropped out. Staring for another moment at them, he forced a smile. "Well, good night and good luck. I'll see you in the morning." With that he was gone, out into the fresh night air. His men streamed out behind him, talking quietly as they disappeared into the darkness back to their barracks. The ever faithful Radl joined him and together they smoked, exhaling into the crisp evening breeze, lost in their own thoughts. Then Radl turned to Skorzeny, "Let's go have a drink." Nodding, the big Austrian crushed out his cigarette under the heel of his oversize boot. It was a long way from Rastenburg to Pratica di Mare. Tomorrow, for better or worse, they would know if it had been all worthwhile.

## XIII

And now it was Sunday. Skorzeny assembled his men on the airstrip together with Student's paratroopers. Anxiously, he looked around for Radl, but the moon-faced young lieutenant was nowhere to be seen. Just as he was getting ready to go back to the barracks to search for his second in command, a staff car pulled up in a cloud of dust. Radl had kept his promise to himself. There, seated next to him in the car, was General Soleti, dressed in a much-bemedaled uniform. A half hour earlier Radl had screeched to a halt in front of the general's home, told him he was urgently wanted at Student's headquarters, and whisked him away. Now, as the general approached the crop-headed paratroop commander, Radl signaled urgently to Student behind Soleti's back. For a moment Student looked at him quizically, then suddenly grasped the meaning of Radl's gestures. "My dear General Soleti, how good to see you. Now, before we discuss anything, I should tell you that we're off this morning to liberate the Duce. I presume you'll be glad to see him and shake his hand?" Soleti, taken aback, stuttered, "Well, yes...of course I will." Student, smiling, clapped him on the back, "Good, good. Then you'll be going with us." Then he turned and walked swiftly away, leaving the general staring around curiously at the heavily armed men on the runway.

As the men filed into a hangar for one last briefing, Radl lingered behind

to talk with Soletti. The idea of being with the party to rescue the Duce was intriguing to him. In fact, it should be rather exciting. Radl was surprised to see how calmly the general was taking it all. Then, he had an idea why Soletti wasn't the least bit nervous. Following the Italian's gaze, Radl found himself staring at the trucks used to bring the paratroopers from the barracks to the airstrip. Soletti thought they were going by road to Gran Sasso.

Suddenly, as Radl and Soletti stood outside the hangar, each with his own thoughts about the upcoming rescue, the roar of approaching aircraft was heard. Without warning, bombs began falling at the end of the runway, crunching their way like footsteps towards the gliders. Radl and Soletti hugged the ground as dirt and debris flew through the air. Then, as quickly as they had come, the planes were gone. In their wake several gliders had suffered minor damage. Take-off time was changed from 12:30 to 1 o'clock to repair them.

Thirty miles away, in a bumpy field that passed for an airstrip near Castel Gandolfo, Captain Heinrich Gerlach of the Luftwaffe prepared to climb into his Fieseler-Storch observation plane. The tiny Storch, not much bigger than a Piper Cub, was a big switch from the Heinkel Gerlach had flown to Rome over a month before when Student and Skorzeny had been his passengers. As Student's personal pilot, Gerlach had been assigned the crucial role of landing on Gran Sasso after the liberation of Mussolini and flying the former dictator to freedom.



Gerlach didn't know that Student was at that moment trying feverously to call him on the telephone manned on the pasture by a nearby airman. But Student was having no luck. All telephone communication had been cut by the bombing raid. There was no way to inform Gerlach that the mission had been delayed half an hour. At precisely 12:30 Gerlach took off. With luck he would be over Gran Sasso in an hour. He hoped the rescue wouldn't take too long. The little plane had no room for fuel reserves.

## XIV

While at Gran Sasso, the Duce was permitted to write, read newspapers, and listen to the radio. He could also play cards and take walks with but a single guard. On September 8, Mussolini heard on the radio that Italy had surrendered and that the Allies had landed at Calabria and Salerno. On September 10, over Berlin radio, he heard that one condition of the armistice was his delivery to the Allies. The dictator announced that he would not be taken alive. His guard told him that if he should receive orders to surrender him, he would give Mussolini an hour's warning and let him escape. But the Duce did not trust him. In letters to his family he announced that his guards all had "shifty and sinister looks" and the "interior and exterior aspects of cutthroats."

Article 29 of the Italian armistice agreement, calling for the "immediate apprehension and surrender of Benito Mussolini into the hands of the United Nations" had effected a profound change in the former dictator. Resigned ever since his ouster to fatalism, he now longed for rescue. But Gran Sasso seemed impregnable and the Duce was in despair.

Earlier on this peaceful Sunday, the dictator had dismissed angrily a local shepard whom the guards thought would amuse him with his fortune telling. Pouring over his greasy playing cards, the shepard had told Mussolini, "You will be rescued in a most romantic way." The Duce had exploded. "You and your damned prophecies! You are trying to make a fool of me!"

Now, at two o'clock in the afternoon, Mussolini was sitting in the sun in his window when he heard the roar of planes nearby. Suddenly, to his astonishment, several gliders crash-landed in the yard not 300 feet away. Skorzeny had finally found his elusive prisoner.

## XV

Minutes earlier Gerlach had been piloting his little Storch 2000 feet above Gran Sasso, hidden from the guards by the huge nearby peak of Monte Corno. He was worried, for he had yet to see any gliders and his fuel was running low.

For half an hour he had been cruising in circles, wondering desperately where Skorzeny was. Then he spotted them. But there were only two. Where were the others?

Skorzeny was wondering the same thing. To his horror he had seen the two lead gliders suddenly gain altitude and fall to the rear. Unknown to the big commando, they had hit a strong updraft and were now drifting to a soft landing some miles away in the valley. Also unknown to Skorzeny was the fact that two more of his gliders in the rear had fallen prey to bomb craters back at Pratica di Mare. Behind him, but still destined to land at Gran Sasso, were six more gliders containing the bulk of his troops and Student's paratroopers. Now, with only Radl's glider to accompany him, his was the lead attack craft.

Inside the glider it was hot and stuffy. Behind Skorzeny a corporal was vomiting into his helmet from airsickness. In front of the big Austrian, General Soleti of the Carabinieri had turned as green as his uniform. Skorzeny pulled out his bayonet and slashed a hole in the glider's canvas covering large enough to see Campo Imperatore through. Below his lay the landing site and it was now horribly apparent to the commando how poor his photographs actually were. The hotel's front lawn was actually a steep hill, strewn with boulders. Skorzeny's pilot, Lieutenant Elimar Meyer-Wehner, cut the ropes connecting the glider with its big Henschel towing aircraft. The wind rusehd by as the glider's 2000 pounds dropped toward the hotel at fifty miles per hour.

The glider struck the hill with a resounding ripping and scraping noise as the barbed wire wrapped around its wheels for traction was torn off by the boulders. Finally it came to a rest just outside the hotel's entrance. Radl's glider jolted to a stop right behind it. The door bolts were immediately pulled back and Skorzeny and his men poured out.

Other gliders were now landing, bringing to seventy the total strength of Skorzeny's attacking force. One glider crashed at an angle, careening across the sloping rocky yard. No one emerged when it finally ground to a halt. But luck was on Skorzeny's side. The shock of the assault, coming as it did at midday, and the ferocious appearance of the heavily armed Germans, completely befuddled the 250 Italians on the mountain.

Skorzeny, shouting "Don't shoot! Don't shoot!" to his men for fear of sparking a bloodbath which would surely include Mussolini, simply pushed one stunned guard after another out of the way. Entering the resort, he found a guard desperately trying to tap out a message on a telegraph key. The towering commando kicked the man's chair from under him, and as the Italian sprawled on the floor, he destroyed the set with a blow from his machine pistol. But the communications room had no exit into the interior of the hotel, so Skorzeny led his men back outside. Running around the corner of the hotel, he was suddenly faced with a terrace about eight feet off the ground. Boosted by two of his men, Skorzeny pulled himself over the railing. So far, no one had fired a shot.

Upstairs in the hotel, Inspector Gueli was being besieged by his second in command, Lieutenant Albert Faiola. "What do we do? What do we do?" Gueli, still stark naked from his afternoon siesta, replied instantly, "Give up without hesitation." Both men hurried to a window and began shouting, "Don't shoot! Don't shoot!"

Below, Skorzeny was casting his eyes around, looking for a likely direction to lead his men, who had scrambled over the terrace railing right behind him. Glancing upwards, he spotted the familiar face of Mussolini peering out

of a second-story window. He screamed, "Get away from the window!" Leading his men to an entrance hall, Skorzeny collided with Italian troops pouring out. Wielding his pistol like a club, the giant pushed his way through. Seeing a staircase which seemed to lead to the Duce's floor, Skorzeny quickly ran up it, followed by his men.

Opening the first door he came to, he saw Mussolini standing with two Italian officers. The two officers were tied up and Mussolini, surrounded by German paratroopers, was led by Skorzeny downstairs. When the party reached the ground floor, scattered shots could be heard as the rest of Skorzeny's men returned the fire of Italian guards who had just realized what was happening. Mussolini, spotting Soletti, white as a sheet, finally stumbling towards the building, quickly stepped towards the entrance of the hotel and yelled to the nearest group of Italian guards, "What are you doing? Don't you see? There's an Italian general. Don't shoot. Everything is all right." The firing trickled off, then finally stopped.

Skorzeny demanded of the nearest Italian officer that he surrender, but the man said he did not have the authority. Another Italian chose this moment to come forward. It was Gueli, now dressed in baggy pants and an undershirt. He asked for a moment to consider Skorzeny's request. His request was granted and the little man disappeared into a side room. Emerging exactly a minute later, he held out to Skorzeny a glass of wine. "To the gallant victor," he said. Mussolini then turned to Skorzeny with tears in his eyes. "I knew my friend Adolf Hitler would not abandon me. I embrace my liberator."

But the Duce was not quite free. There was still the problem of getting him off the Gran Sasso. Gerlach, still nursing his fuel supply, was overhead.



Skorzeny signalled him to land, and a few minutes later the little plane touched down bumpily on the 200-yard, downhill lawn of the hotel. Except for a helicopter, it was the only aircraft capable of such a short landing. Taxiing back to the waiting group of men at the Imperatore's entrance, Gerlach knew that his take-off would be a close thing. The runway ended at the edge of a cliff.

It was 2:17 in the afternoon. The rescue had taken only ten minutes. In the next hour Skorzeny's men alternated between moving boulders to clear a path for Gerlach and having their pictures snapped by an enterprising war correspondent for the German propaganda magazine Signal. He had traveled up the cable car to the resort from the funicular station far below, which had been seized earlier by a special detachment of paratroops under the command of Major Otto-Harald Mors. Later the men would travel down by the cable car to waiting trucks which would carry them back to Rome. For Mussolini, however, no such quiet ride could be contemplated. He was too valuable a personage to risk over 100 miles of unknown roads.

As Gerlach prepared to guide his famous passenger to the Storch, word came that the plane which was to carry Skorzeny from the funicular to Practica di Mare, where he would accompany the Duce aboard a Heinkel bound for Vienna, had crashed near the cable car station, severely damaging its landing gear. Now Skorzeny would have to fly with Gerlach if he expected to fulfill Hitler's orders to him to be "personally responsible" for the Duce's welfare on his flight to Austria and freedom. Mussolini could not be safely kept near the Italian capital for the hours it would take Skorzeny to drive the roads back to Practica di Mare.

Skorzeny approached Gerlach with this point of view. The pilot was incensed. It was too dangerous, he said. The Storch could not hope to successfully take off with three men on board. Skorzeny argued with him, gradually winning Gerlach over. "You're going by air. How much flying time have you got? Suppose something happens on the way and you're killed? If so, he's alone in a desert. And if he's lost and I fail in my duty to the Führer, I have to put a pistol to my head." Skorzeny, only a month after first entering the high circle of Hitler, had already learned the rules of the game. Gerlach gave in.

Mussolini was talking was Karl Radl during the Skorzeny-Gerlach tug of war. Already since his rescue, Radl could detect signs of his old pomposity coming back. "And what are my Romans doing?" he asked. Radl was direct, "Looting, Duce." Mussolini made a gesture of irritation. "I don't mean the looters. I mean the true Fascists." Radl told the truth, "We didn't find any, Duce." Suddenly, Radl noticed, Mussolini looked old and tired, like a peasant who has fought all his life against the elements and has finally lost. Then Gerlach signaled for him to get in the plane.

Skorzeny was already in place, his giant frame squeezed behind the Storch's two seats. Gerlach strapped Mussolini in, then went around and climbed in himself. Starting the engine, he locked his brakes while building up r.p.m. He was going to need every ounce of power. Then he released the brakes and the plane rushed down the slope. Five yards from the edge, Gerlach put his flaps full down, hoping to get the Storch into the air. "Hold tight to the struts!" he yelled to his passengers.

Suddenly, the plane's left wheel struck a rock. The wing canted downwards

and the Storch tumbled off the edge of the cliff. Radl, standing with the others back at the hotel, collapsed on top of Mussolini's luggage. He had fainted.

Gerlach pushed the stick forward, gaining speed and hoping that the airstream would push the wings up. Finally the plane leveled off within a hundred feet of the ground and Gerlach managed to climb a bit. Around 5:30 that afternoon the little Storch landed at Practica di Mare, its oil line leaking and its right strut crumpled beyond recognition. The Duce fervently pumped Gerlach's hand. "Thank you for my life," he said.

At Practica di Mare Skorzeny led Mussolini to a waiting Heinkel which took them to Vienna, where the Duce's family had been brought. There, around midnight, they entered the Imperial Hotel in a flurry of security agents. "I don't need anything," said Mussolini, "not even pyjamas. I'm going right to bed."

But for Skorzeny there was to be no rest. Immediately, a series of phone calls came in for him. The first was from Himmler, who congratulated the new daring boy of his SS. Then Skorzeny's wife came in. Before he even had time to say hello to her, the phone was ringing again. The hotel operator was unintelligible. Finally Skorzeny made sense of his message: Adolf Hitler was on the phone from the "Wolf's Lair." "Major Skorzeny," thus instantly announcing the big Austrian's promotion, "Major Skorzeny, you are a man after my own heart. You have gained the day and crowned our mission with success! Your leader thanks you!" Next, a colonel wearing the coveted Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross walked in. He saluted Skorzeny, then removed the cross from around his neck and put it over Skorzeny's head. "Orders of the Führer," he

said. It was the first time in the history of the German military that the award had been presented on the same day it was earned.

For Otto Skorzeny, the 12th day of September marked the beginnings of a career; which in the next two years, was to dazzle both sides in the conflict which was the Second World War.

HITLER'S TROJAN HORSE:

THE SECRET MISSIONS OF OTTO SKORZENY

Churchill's remark was a spontaneous remark made in a speech. The German propaganda minister, said it reflected the "then to spirit of Germany," and then confided to his diary, "There has hardly been a military event during the entire war that has so deeply stirred the emotions and evoked such human interest." The press of both axis and Allied nations gave the story front page coverage for several days. In the German magazine KAMPF, whose correspondent had traveled up the Rhine in his car to Gran Sasso, devoted an entire issue to the liberation.

Skorzeny became as well known as a movie star. His picture was everywhere... now with Hitler at Paderborn, next with Goebbels at Karlsruhe. Medals

**Part Two:**

was pinned on him: the German Cross in silver, the Italian Cross of the Grand Musketeers from Mussolini, the Gold Medal of the Luftwaffe, and of course, the coveted Knight's Cross. A few days after the rescue he was spotlighted in a patriotic rally at the Sports Palace in Berlin, where he awarded medals to other soldiers.

Churchill, speaking in Parliament called the rescue "a stroke of great daring" and went on to say that, "it certainly shows there are many possibilities of this kind open in modern warfare." Before the year was out, the British had duplicated Skorzeny's tactics by the successful kidnapping of a German general from Crete.

The big Austrians found him invited to a series of high-ranking parties in the capital. He had lunch with Martin Bormann, tea with Foreign Minister Ribbentrop, and dinner with Dr. Goebbels. He rapidly became Hitler's favorite, but after a while the midnight sessions at the Wolf's Lair, when Hitler would relax with his intimates, depressed him with their air of sym-



Mussolini's rescue was a world-wide sensation. Goebbles, the German propaganda minister, said it reflected the "heroic spirit of Germany," and then confided to his diary, "There has hardly been a military event during the entire war that has so deeply stirred the emotions and evoked such human interest." The press of both Axis and Allied nations gave the story front page coverage for several days, and the German magazine SIGNAL, whose correspondent had traveled up the cable car to Gran Sasso, devoted an entire issue to the liberation.

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phancy. His work at Freidenthal had been neglected and he longed to return to his old circle of friends and associates. One evening he told Hitler that he thought he really should return to his headquarters. Hitler reluctantly agreed, and as a going-away present gave Skorzeny a battalion of men to be trained for use as commandos on every front. Jodl beamed agreement, "Why, you can enlist 4000 men straight away from the Brandenburg Division. Fine material there."

Skorzeny's quick departure from the rarified atmosphere of Hitler's headquarters is perhaps a measure of the man. A more ambitious officer might have milked an association with the Führer for all it was worth. Power of the scale available at the top of Nazi Germany was nothing to be laughed at or ignored, but Skorzeny rejected it and returned to Freidenthal. Behind him in the Wolf's Lair he left several disgruntled members of the High Command, who had seen in Mussolini's daring rescue one more confirmation of Hitler's "instinct" as opposed to their sound military logic. But he also left a Führer much impressed with his methods and an abiding favor for the future.

Back at Freidenthal, Skorzeny busied himself with the training of the four thousand men he had received from the famed Brandenburg Division. He was convinced that to be effective, a commando must be skilled in all the arts of warfare. Language schools were set up, as were facilities for parachute training and underwater demolition. Each man must be taught to be able to drive and repair everything from a motorcycle to a locomotive. Methods of disguise and camouflage were taught alongside techniques for sabotaging factories. A steel plant nearby was chosen as a convenient testing ground. Whole classes of Freidenthal trainees were slipped under the eyes of watchful guards to plant explosive charges on vital bits of machinery without being detected.

In almost every case, they were successful and Skorzeny would explain to a frustrated plant manager that he "better tighten up security."

From his parent organization, the Waffen SS, Skorzeny received a request for a list of all the material he needed. An exhaustive reply was sent, containing pleas for everything from flamethrowers to diving suits. A few weeks later Radl received an answer. Everything they had requested was approved...but since Major Skorzeny now commanded a unit of division size, he must work out his own methods of acquiring material.

So began Skorzeny's career as a thief. Confronting his men with the reply from headquarters, he told them that the Freidenthal command was practically a world unto itself. The men, eager to use the skills they had been taught, immediately started combing half the supply depots in Europe, mostly at night. Trainloads of war material vanished, much to the chagrin of the High Command. Quartermaster sheds were visited, and the next morning were found to be nearly empty, with a note scribbled by Radl that the boys at Freidenthal had "temporarily borrowed" three hundred machine guns and forty thousand rounds of ammunition. Authorization was "on the way." Soon Skorzeny had one of the few really well-equipped units in the German Army.

The Freidenthal Commando school became a haven for men who felt useless in other units. Anyone who had a taste for adventure was drawn to its headquarters in the Berlin suburbs. Skorzeny would wrangle transfers for soldiers he thought might prove to be useful in the future. Even the most troublesome, hardened men calmed down when faced with the prospect of being returned to their old units. With Skorzeny, they felt part of an elite of the military, somewhat akin to the U.S. Marines, but even more dashing. The Mussolini rescue had worked wonders for Freidenthal recruitment.

Training at Freidenthal was interrupted twice in the next few months. The first call for Skorzeny and his men was issued early in November of 1943. Hitler wanted his commando to be ready at any time to kidnap the leaders of the Vichy government, led by Marshal Petain. Petain had recently shown signs of wavering in his commitment to a neutral course for France mainly because the London-based government of Charles de Gaulle was exerting pressure on Vichy to throw off the yoke of German occupation and flee to North Africa. There, a new, anti-German government would be established and supported by General Henri Giraud and the Divisions under his command which had escaped the German victory in 1940. Petain's recent behavior toward German regulations, such as the deportation of French citizens to work in German factories, had convinced Hitler that the old Marshal was getting ready to switch sides.

So, late in November, Skorzeny and Radl arrived in Paris with their men. They went directly to the German headquarters in the Rue de Rivoli, but found that no one there knew anything about the mission. Then they visited the headquarters of SS in the Champs Élysees, where people seemed to know even less. Finally, using his orders from Hitler as a shield, Skorzeny collected several thousand men for whatever might lie ahead. A week later he received orders to proceed to Vichy.

Skorzeny had been ordered to be ready to seize all the roads leading into and out of Petain's capital. When he received the codewords, "The Wolf Howls," he was to rush into the city with a group of picked men and arrest the marshal and his staff. For almost a month, no further orders were forthcoming from Hitler's headquarters. Skorzeny spent the time designing a two-layered cordon around the city, one which would not be obvious but which could be

tightened at a moment's notice. He and Radl spent hours of every day walking through the city, stopping for lunch several times at a restaurant near Petain's headquarters, where they would survey the best methods of storming the area.

Then, just before Christmas, word came that the kidnapping was off and Skorzeny and his men were ordered to return home. Marshal Petain continued his wavering course to everyone's confusion, blissfully unaware of how close he had come to being snatched away.

Activity at Freidenthal had barely returned to normal when Skorzeny was ordered by the High Command to get Tito, the Yugoslav partisan leader, dead or alive. This plan was a challenge to the big Austrian, for the guerilla was known to be as tricky and cunning as anything the Germans could devise to capture him. Skorzeny flew to Belgrade, where he discovered to his dismay that Yugoslavian politics were as confused as anything the Italians could devise. Royalists, under the command of General Mihailovitch, competed not only with the Germans, but also with the communists under Tito. Wandering bands of Chetniks and Croatian Ustachi added to the muddle.

Skorzeny drove to Fruska Gora, where he set up headquarters to trace Tito. After four weeks the partisan leader was located in Dvar, part of Western Bosnia, in a cliffside headquarters which overlooked all approaches to the area. Skorzeny planned an elaborate attack which might have succeeded had it not been for the interference of the local German military commander. Convinced that Skorzeny's commando tactics would not work, he ordered the headquarters to be bombed. By the time Skorzeny could arrive on the scene, Tito had disappeared. All they found was a uniform stiched with gold stars. Disappointed, Skorzeny and his men returned to Berlin



The Tito affair, however, was soon forgotten as Freidenthal became embroiled in the testing of new German "secret weapons." Foremost among these was the "Nigger," a manned torpedo designed to be guided towards a ship by a daring pilot who would abandon it before the actual collision. Developed in principal by the Italians, Skorzeny was asked by the German Navy to perfect it. As a trained engineer the giant Austrian enjoyed working on the device. From his many naval recruits, Skorzeny chose the best of his divers and swimmers. By June of 1944, the Niggers were in use throughout the Mediterranean and in the English Channel. At the Anzio bridge-head, Skorzeny sent out twenty of the torpedos. Fourteen men reported back to him. For the loss of six sailors, the Niggers had sunk six thousand tons of merchant shipping and damaged two cruisers. Soon the Allies came to be wary of them, so Skorzeny ordered dummy Niggers to be floated on one side of a convoy. While the guns were busy firing at the fake torpedos, real Niggers would attack from the opposite direction.

The invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944, came as no surprise to Skorzeny. Months earlier he had been requested by the Navy to help design beach obstacles for deployment by Rommel's troops. Shown a map of the French coast, Skorzeny had picked ten sections of beach where he thought the Allies would come ashore. June 6 showed that he was correct in half of his choices: Utah, Gold, Sword, Juno, and Omaha were the Allied names for five of the areas he had chosen. He had less luck in his plans for beach obstacles. His ideas were so elaborate and involved so many types of new devices, such as flame throwers built into the sand dunes, that they were rejected by the High Command: "Since the Führer has said that the Atlantic Wall is invulnerable, and since the preparations Major Skorzeny proposes might suggest to the troops

witnessing them that there are some doubts about this question after all, the scheme cannot be approved, either in whole or part."

So, the invasion came, and even the masterful leadership of the "Desert Fox" could not halt the Allied advance. More and more territory fell. The "Thousand-year Reich" of Adolf Hitler was cracking, and the skills of Otto Skorzeny would now be demanded for increasingly more important missions.

## HITLER'S TROJAN HORSE:

### THE SECRET MISSIONS OF OTTO SKORZENY

The Eastern Front in Germany which Skorzeny had predicted as a disaster was followed by a series of German defeats in both the West and the East. In the battle for France Field Marshal Rommel was in retreat by the end of June that he had lost 723 generals, 174 colonels and approximately 150,000 men. On the Eastern Front the Russians, who were attacking through the Baltic countries, were wreaking havoc in equal extent.

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#### Part Three:

fashioned a plan for the assassination of the Führer and the assumption of rule by the conspirators. In the midst of these discussions, the plan was implemented on July 20, when

**"After all, we're not in the midst  
of a civil war."**

Count von Stauffenberg, detonated a bomb in his briefcase during Hitler's everyday military briefing. Von Stauffenberg, who left the briefing room minutes before the explosion, saw the building erupt in flames from the nearby offices of the Rastenburg command's signal chief. The signal chief, General Fellgiebel, was also in on the plot, and as the count fled the compound for the nearby airfield and a waiting plane, he flashed the word to officers in Berlin that Hitler was dead. But Hitler was only wounded, and as von Stauffenberg returned to Berlin to guide his fellow conspirators at the headquarters of the Home Defense Force in the Bendlerstrasse, the Führer sent out orders for the uprising to be immediately suppressed. And so Otto Skorzeny stepped back on the stage.

The Allied invasion in Normandy which Skorzeny had predicted so accurately was followed by a series of German defeats in both the West and the East. In the battle for France Field Marshal Rommel was to report to OKW by the end of June that he had lost "28 generals, 354 commanders and approximately 250,000 men." On the Eastern Front the Russians, who were advancing through the Baltic countries, were wrecking havoc in equal amounts.

German's obvious eventual defeat cast many members of the General Staff into the darkest gloom. Convinced that the only way to save Germany from the widespread destruction which would accompany an invasion of the Fatherland was by eliminating the warlord Hitler, several high-placed officers fashioned a plan for the assassination of the Führer and the assumption of rule by the military. Dubbed "Valkyrie" by its creators, the plan was implemented on July 20, when Klaus Schenk, the Count von Stauffenberg, detonated a bomb in his briefcase during Hitler's noonday military briefing. Von Stauffenberg, who left the briefing room minutes before the explosion, saw the building erupt in flames from the nearby offices of the Rastenburg compound's signal chief. The signals chief, General Fellgiebel, was also in on the plot, and as the count fled the compound for the nearby airfield and a waiting plane, he flashed the word to officers in Berlin that Hitler was dead. But Hitler was only wounded, and as von Stauffenberg returned to Berlin to guide his fellow conspirators at the headquarters of the Home Defense Army in the Bendlerstrasse, the Führer sent out orders for the uprising to be immediately suppressed. And so Otto Skorzeny stepped back on the stage.

## II

For Skorzeny, the hot and muggy 20th of July had been much the same as many of the days which had come and gone since the invasion of Europe more than a month before. His work at Freidenthal with his crack SS commando troops was pressing on him. Everything was urgent now that it had become obvious that Germany was fighting for its life. The Tito affair still plagued him; he was sure he could get the guerilla leader if permitted to work in his own way, undisturbed by Wehrmacht interference. As he and Karl boarded the six o'clock night train for his native Vienna, Skorzeny had high hopes of discovering new information from his sources there which would lead him to the Yugoslav partisan. Both men were in high spirits as they settled into their reserved passenger compartment.\*

The train was inching its way through Berlin's crowded Lichterfelde station, its last passenger stop in the capital, when a young officer ran panting up beside Skorzeny's compartment. "Major Skorzeny! Major Skorzeny!" The commando jerked open the window and motioned to the man. "Major, you must return immediately. Higher orders. There has been an attempt on the life of

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\* NOTE: Skorzeny had other reasons for feeling good. The commando leader, now a hero and a familiar face to every schoolchild, was very much aware of his own importance, and it is not too harsh to say that he had let fame swell his head a bit. Although he shied away from being arrogant or boastful of his accomplishments, he knew that wherever he went news of his rescue of Mussolini and his subsequent successful work in the field of new weapons would precede him. While never directly referring to his past, he could now expect deference to his opinion on that basis. He was a celebrity, and he milked it for all it was worth. But in the final analysis he knew to whom he owed his success and was always ready to serve him in any capacity: Adolf Hitler.



the Führer! It is part of an attempted putsch!" Incredulous, Skorzeny shrugged. He had heard rumors of an assassination attempt earlier in the day, but had dismissed them as part of the usual Berlin flair for the ridiculous.

"Come now, that's impossible. A few of the gentlemen at G.H.Q. must have got flurried." The officer continued to plead with him. Finally, the big Austrian gave in. "Oh well, I'll go back with you." He turned to a bemused Radl, "Go on to Vienna and start the discussions with our friend. I'll try to join you tomorrow." Grabbing his baggage, Skorzeny hurried to the nearest exit door and clambered off the train. The messenger escorted him to a waiting staff car and soon the two were speeding back towards downtown Berlin. On the way the young officer briefed him on the little that he knew.

The Führer, according to the High Command, had survived the attempt, and now was convinced that the plot was centered in a handful of generals and other staff officers of the Home Defense Army. Colonel von Stauffenberg was already under suspicion and had been ever since his hasty departure from Rastenburg had been noticed. It was rumored that several armored units were advancing on the capital. No one knew what the intentions of their commanders were. No one knew who was in charge of the War Office. Conflicting orders were being received everywhere. The Army and the SS might have to fight it out... Skorzeny listened skeptically to the officer's ravings.

In the fading light he was driven to SS Intelligence Headquarters, where he immediately encountered the first indications of the general panic which had seized all official buildings in Berlin since news of the assassination attempt had been received. Clerks barred his way to the inner offices, brand-

ishing machine pistols which looked, to Skorzeny, very much out of place in their unaccustomed hands. Never the man to fool around in a dangerous situation, the commando bashed the closest clerk over the head with his own pistol. Suitably awed by the pistol-wielding giant they saw before them, the others quickly surrendered to him. Cautioning them about playing with dangerous toys, Skorzeny led them to a basement and locked them in. Then he hurried up the stairs to the main offices, where he found his immediate superior, Walther Schellenberg, cowering behind a desk with a gun. Schellenberg admitted that he had equipped the clerks with their weapons. He lashed out against the conspirators. "The situation is muddled and full of danger! But if they come for me, I am ready! I shall defend myself; you can be sure of that."

The small, dark-haired man who was two years Skorzeny's junior made a pathetic study in courage. Once, the hulking commando had thought that Schellenberg was a splendid figure in his dapper black and silver SS uniform; but now he was just a short, paunchy man whose doughy face was streaming with sweat. He appealed to the commando, "Couldn't you send for one of your companies to assure the protection of this building? You should look sharp."

Skorzeny had, in truth, not thought to alert his men in the confusion of the previous moments. Immediately he called Freidenthal, thankful that the phones still worked even if nothing else seemed to. When his orderly answered, Skorzeny asked for Captain Adrian von Folkersam. Von Folkersam was a winner of the Knight's Cross in Russia and had been a member of the famed Brandenburg Division. The Brandenburg had been composed of officers and men who were scholars and linguists in addition to their regular soldierly duties, but it had fallen

on hard times since Hitler had given 4000 of its men to Skorzeny. The High Command had used it as cannon fodder against the Red Army, completely oblivious to the treasure it was throwing away. Von Folkersam had approached Skorzeny for a place in the Freidenthal group, where his talents could be well used. It took Skorzeny five months to arrange a transfer for the young captain, and he finally had to go to Admiral Canaris, then the head of German Intelligence, to receive an okay. He was glad now he had persisted in his efforts. Von Folkersam was one of his most trusted commanders.

Von Folkersam arrived at the phone. "Alert the Battalion immediately," Skorzeny ordered. "Captain Fucker will take command and await orders that come from me personally. Send the First Company to the Central Office of the Waffen SS, where I am now. You yourself and Officer Candidate Ostafel, whom I shall take temporarily as orderly officer, hop into a car and burn up the road so you get here first!"

Skorzeny hung up and turned back to Schellenberg. "I would advise you to disarm your men completely. If 'they', whoever they are, come for you before my company gets here, then I advise you to take off. You won't be able to hold them off with a pistol and a bunch of clerks." Then the big Austrian abandoned Schellenberg to his gloomy thoughts and went out into the street, where he awaited the arrival of von Folkersam and Ostafel while strolling up and down the curb in the twilight.

A half hour later they drove up and came to a stop with a screeching of tires. Skorzeny knew they had driven like madmen, for Freidenthal was on the other side of the city's outer limits, and Berlin with its angular streets was no easy place to speed in. He told the young captain to wait at the Central

Headquarters building until he returned, and to post the men around the offices when they arrived. "I'm going on a little tour to see what's really happening. I'll call you when I can." Skorzeny cursed the Army Quartermaster Corps for not supplying his unit with walkie-talkies such as the Americans used. Then he was in the car with Ostafel and on his way to see an old friend, Colonel Bollbrinker, the commander of all armored vehicles for the defense of Berlin.

The streets leading to Bollbrinker's headquarters in Fehrbellin Platz were calm and virtually deserted, an encouraging sign of normalcy in a government sector after 5 p.m. But as Skorzeny and Ostafel turned into the plaza they were greeted with the sight of two huge Panzer tanks blocking their way, their gun barrels pointing ominously at the approaching vehicle through the gloom. Skorzeny decided to take a chance. Standing up boldly in his Volkswagen, fully open to fire, he hoped that the tank troops would recognize his huge bulk and now famous countenance before taking any action. Luckily, they did, and the little car was waved through by grinning tankers sitting in their turrets.

Bollbrinker received Skorzeny at once. He confessed matter-of-factly that he really didn't know what was happening. He, too, had heard that Hitler had been the object of an assassination attempt, but after that one piece of information his sources had begun contradicting themselves and each other. Hitler was dead, said the Home Army Command. But the High Command said he was very much alive and that the tank commander should ignore any conflicting reports. Bollbrinker had received orders from the Commander-in-Chief of the Home Army to bring his tanks from their base in the Berlin suburb of Wunsdorf to the center of the city proper. He had done so, and the two Skorzeny had seen were

a part of a much greater force guarding the other entrances to Fehrbellin Platz. Now he was waiting for further developments. "Besides," he explained to Skorzeny, "I have decided from now on to obey no orders except those of the Inspector of Armored Vehicles, in other words, General Guderian himself. Who the devil can make head or tail of all this hodgepodge? Imagine, they asked me to send armed reconnoitering parties against the Berlin barracks of the Waffen SS! What do you think about this, Skorzeny?"

Skorzeny was amazed. Bollbrinker had given him the first concrete evidence that there was indeed a power struggle taking place. Schellenberg had made very little sense in his alarmed condition, but Bollbrinker was calm and deliberate in his speech, and now Skorzeny was outraged to finally discover that the "putsch" was no fantasy. His loyalties were of course to Hitler, and these were strengthened by the knowledge that members of the General Staff and the Home Army were completely neglecting their obligations to the troops who were at that very moment dying for Germany on the Eastern and Western fronts. Whole Army Groups were being left to their own devices, without counsel or direction, without supplies as pleas for aid tumbled unread from teletype machines. Skorzeny resolved to take some sort of immediate action to clear up as much of the confusion as possible. The first danger to be reckoned with, he believed, was the possibility of Army tanks being pitted against members of the Waffen SS. Just the sight of tanks might well provoke shooting between the two groups

Skorzeny advised Bollbrinker to hold fast. "After all, we're not in the midst of a civil war. I think it would be extremely rash to carry out so crazy an order. If you don't mind, Colonel, I'm off to the Waffen SS barracks at



Lichterfelde to see what's going on there. I'll phone you from there and let you know what the situation is." Bollbrinker was much relieved. With Guderian out of the city, the tank commander had very little to base his decisions on. Skorzeny could give him the information he needed without provoking the bloodshed which would surely occur if he were to send one of his own tank crews over to Lichterfelde.

### III

Skorzeny found the Lichterfelde barracks, where he had been stationed in 1940 as an officer cadet in the Adolf Hitler Regiment, completely quiet. Although the troops had been alerted, their commanding officer, a lieutenant colonel, was dubious about following orders from any quarter. At Skorzeny's urging, the colonel promised not to take any hasty action in the near future. Relieved, Skorzeny called Bollbrinker and told him that the Waffen SS didn't have the "the faintest intention of intervening."

Skorzeny also called the patiently waiting von Folkersam and told the young captain to keep the Freidenthal company in readiness in the great courtyard of the SS headquarters. As he hung up, Skorzeny wondered if any other troops besides Bollbrinker's might have received misleading and dangerous orders. His mind jumped immediately to his old commander, General Student, and his airborne troops.

Skorzeny rushed outside to his car and, slamming the door with a jolt which shook the whole frame, urgently ordered the harassed Ostarek to drive him immediately to the headquarters of the paratroops on the edge of the

Wannsee, one of the numerous lakes which surrounded the city. Skorzeny had reason to be excited: one wrong order and Student's tough paratroopers could turn Berlin upside down.

But Student wasn't at Wannsee when Skorzeny pulled up to the airborne headquarters a half hour later. His Chief of Staff, a colonel, said that the General was at his home relaxing. Where was his house, inquired Skorzeny? Why, back in Lichterfelde, of course. Throwing up his hands in frustration, the towering commando jumped back into the car. The car had traveled twenty feet when it suddenly jerked to a halt. Skorzeny had decided that it would be a good idea to take along the General's Chief of Staff so that he could return to his unit with orders if necessary. Jumping out of the car, Skorzeny approached the colonel with his suggestion. The man agreed and soon the trio was speeding back to the Lichterfelde suburb.

Skorzeny found Student in a scene of domestic bliss. As he poured over papers in his dressing gown, his wife sat nearby with her embroidery. The big Austrian was struck by the ridiculousness of the situation. Here was one of the top military commanders in Berlin taking his ease in a wicker arm-chair while plotters were attempting a coup d'etat.

Student was plainly astonished that Skorzeny would call on him so late at night, but still he received the commando courteously. When Skorzeny announced that he had "come on a matter of duty," the portly general's wife vanished discreetly. But as soon as the Austrian launched into a description of what had occurred and what he had seen, the general interrupted him sharply.

"Come, come, my dear Skorzeny, what on earth are you talking about? A putsch? Why, that's impossible! Plots and mutinies? You must be dreaming!"

Finally, only after much argument, the commander of Germany's most modern service agreed to place his units on alert and order them to accept commands only from him in person. Then the phone rang. It was Hermann Goering to affirm all that Skorzeny had told the little general. The commando could hear Goering's excited voice streaming over the wires.

"Plot to murder Hitler...War Office gone crazy... They're all up to the neck in it! No one should accept orders from the Home Forces...They're all traitors...you must obey only the High Command!..."

Then Skorzeny heard Student repeating word for word Goering's final instructions: "Calm and coolness in order at all price to avoid incidents which might degenerate into civil war. I quite understand, Herr Reichsmarshal." Hanging up, Student turned back to Skorzeny, "Well, I'm convinced. I shall call my units right away. I'll keep in touch with this fellow Bollbrinker you told me about also."

Skorzeny thanked Student for his time and then departed, leaving the tough little paratrooper and his Chief of Staff to discuss plans. Approaching Ostafel as he left the Student villa, he called out, "Back to the SS building! I hope von Folkersam hasn't had much trouble." As the car sped back to the nearby offices, Skorzeny noticed that he was sweating. Was it the warm July night or something else? Probably a little of both, he decided. He loosened the collar of his summer grey uniform, and as he did so, his Knight's Cross tumbled from around his neck and onto the floor of the car. Retrieving it, Skorzeny stared for a moment at its shining silver border and its raised swastika and the date "1939". He remembered how Hitler himself had ordered it delivered to him the night of Mussolini's rescue, and then he made himself a promise that this day's plot would not succeed.

## IV

While Skorzeny was closeted with General Student, his immediate superior, Walther Schellenberg had received orders to arrest the former head of German Intelligence, Admiral Wilhelm Canaris. Canaris, who had fallen from power earlier that year for disagreeing with many of the decisions of high-ranking Reich officials, was suspected by Hitler of playing a major role in the conspiracy. It was the first indication to Schellenberg that the net of Nazi security was closing in on the plotters.

Also while Skorzeny was conversing with the paratroop general, another strange scene of a junior officer trying to convince his superior that dangerous military orders had been issued was being played out. In the Reich Propaganda Ministry offices of Joseph Goebbles, a young political indoctrination officer was trying to convince German's press and radio lord that troops under the command of a Major Otto Remer, an officer of the elite Grossdeutschland Division, were preparing to surround all the important government ministry buildings on orders from the Commander-in-Chief of the Home Army. Goebbles was not convinced. "Well, then," screamed young Hans Hagen, "go to the window and see for yourself!"

It was true. The astonished Goebbles saw heavily armed soldiers taking up seige positions outside his Ministry, the home of the huge German broadcast center, the Deutschlandsender. Goebbles immediately sent for Remer.

The young major, who had just recently been awarded the oak leaves to the Knight's Cross by Hitler personally, was in a quandry. Now he had both orders to arrest Goebbles, the highest ranking Nazi in Berlin on July 20th, and an invitation from the propaganda minister to come to his office. Accom-

panied by twenty of his men, whom he stationed throughout the building with orders to come get him if he did not return in ten minutes, Remer marched into Goebbles' office with drawn pistol. "I have orders to arrest you, Herr Reichsminister."

Goebbles now employed his powers of persuasion, the same powers which had won him advancement for many years in the Nazi hierarchy. "Ah, but Major, what about your officer's oath to the Führer?" Remer immediately answered, "But the Führer is dead, Herr Reichsminister!" Goebbles played his hole card, "But the Führer is alive! I just talked to him myself. Here! I will call him back and let you talk to him yourself." Quickly the crippled propaganda lord picked up a special extension to Hitler's headquarters, and within seconds Hitler himself was on the phone. Goebbles for a moment discussed the state of affairs in Berlin, then handed the phone to Remer. With the first words from the receiver, Remer was standing at attention. Of course he recognized the voice of the man who had only a few weeks before decorated him! The others in the room, among them Albert Speer, the Armaments Minister, could hear only, "Jawohl, Mein Führer...Jawohl!"

Hitler ordered Remer to occupy or surround all the buildings in the Bendlerstrasse, especially the offices of the Home Army. Remer proceeded to the Bendlerstrasse with the zeal only Adolf Hitler could impart. At the same time, orders were sent to main SS headquarters: "Major Skorzeny will report with all the troops at his disposal to the Bendlerstrasse in order to support the action of Major Remer, battalion chief of the guard Grossdeutschland. Major Remer has already begun the encirclement of the ministry.



## V

Skorzeny arrived back at the central SS offices at around 10:15, to be greeted by a quaking Schellenberg. "I have been ordered to arrest Canaris. Can you lend me a few men, say an officer and ten soldiers? On second thought, how about an entire platoon? Canaris, if he really is in this, is likely to be heavily defended." The big commando, whose only resource was the company brought from Freidenthal by von Folkersam, declined to give Schellenberg so much of his manpower. "Besides," said Skorzeny, "it's common knowledge that Canaris is retired and lives alone. I hear all the protection he has is a swarm of dachshunds. Here, take this revolver and go get him. I'll lend you one of my lieutenants." Thus armed, Schellenberg disappeared trembling into the warm summer night. Then Hitler's order to Skorzeny came in.

By eleven o'clock, Skorzeny had assembled all his men outside the Bendorferstrasse offices of the Home Army. In a clump of serious-faced men, he found Remer in the portal of the building. The two introduced themselves and as they tried to decide what action to take, a smartly uniformed general officer walked out between them. Turning to a staff officer silhouetted in the doorway, he said, "I'm going home now. You can reach me in my flat all night." Then he was in a car and off. It was Fromm, the commander of the Home Army and a key figure in the night's confusion. Remer and Skorzeny decided to let no one else leave.

Then Ernst Kaltenbrunner arrived. The sleek commander of the military SS inquired immediately as to the situation. Skorzeny admitted that neither he nor Remer had entered the building since their arrival a very few minutes

before. Kaltenbrunner nodded his understanding. "Well, I'd hate to see what's going on in there right now. Hold on a minute until I can get some lights in place, and then go on in." Skorzeny left Remer and went in search of von Folkersam and Ostafel to take up with him.

Suddenly, the night turned almost as bright as daytime. Kaltenbrunner had hauled into the street the new German weapon, "artificial moonlight," and now the building which housed the headquarters of the conspirators was etched against the dark night sky like some ghostly apparition. No one could leave now without being highly conspicuous.

Skorzeny, followed by von Folkersam and Officer Cadet Ostafel, dashed up the building's wide main stairwell. In a corridor on the second floor they were met by several officers with machine pistols, who demanded of the commandos their mission. Fortunately Skorzeny was acquainted with two of the men, and so soon the Freidenthal trio were the objects of excited explanations. It seemed that an episode of military fratricide which had scared the staff officers half out of their wits had just concluded in the building. There had been suicides and executions, and even a murder or two.

Skorzeny listened in amazement as the story of the conspiracy was unfolded before him. The staff officers told him that they had been witnesses to one of the most turbulent days ever in the history of the General Staff. It was now apparent to them that, for months, a plot to assassinate Hitler and seize the reigns of power had been brewing beneath their very noses. At the center of it was the Chief of Staff of the Home Army, Count von Stauffenberg, a much decorated veteran of the desert campaigns who had lost his left eye, his right hand and two fingers of his left hand when his car had run over a mine in mid-1943. Aided by high-ranking generals who rallied around

his youthful zeal, he had been continuously promoted until finally he was in a position to plant the bomb himself during one of the Führer's daily briefing sessions. The result of his efforts was the confusion prevailing all through Berlin and on every front on this July evening.

Skorzeny asked to be taken to Stauffenberg's office. Someone, probably one of the staff officers, had already been there, for papers and files were strewn around the room. But one set of files had been overlooked, so Skorzeny immediately began to thumb through them. Soon he came across what he thought he might find. Stuffed into a blue folder labeled "Countermeasures in case of Allied attack by airborne troops" was a copy of the "Valkrie" plan, complete with details of the proposed seizure of Berlin's nerve centers and the organs of army command.

He leafed through the report half-heartedly, depressed to see the depth of conspiracy in high circles. Idly, the scar-faced commando lit a cigarette, then turned to face the window overlooking the inner courtyard of the War Office. He stared at the enclosure for a few moments, his bulk surrounded by a haze of blue smoke in the harshness of the room's lights. Then, out of the corner of his eye, he noticed a brightly colored board lying discarded in a corner. He bent over and picked it up, gazing in amazement at what he saw. It was a map of Europe, and according to the printed instructions pasted on it, it was intended for use as part of a game. A player could move so many German armies against so many Russian armies according to a throw of the dice. Skorzeny was disgusted. So this was how the General Staff passed their time while men were being killed in real struggles! What sort of officer, wondered Skorzeny, must this Stauffenberg have been? He tossed the board to the floor, then walked out of the office, his scar pulsing redly

against the backdrop of his pale face.

## VI

Thirty minutes before Skorzeny had arrived at the War Office, there had been a volley of shots in the courtyard outside. Count von Stauffenberg, his aide Lieutenant Haeften, and the chief of the General Army Office, General Olbricht, had been executed in the glare of headlights from an armored car on order of General Fromm. Now they lay under tarpaulins in a corner of the inner square.

Fromm had been in on the conspiracy from the very start, although he had not allowed his name to be used by the plotters in any of their discussions with possible recruits. That afternoon, around 4:30, Stauffenberg, accompanied by Haeften and Olbricht, had rushed into his office, screaming again the message General Fellgiebel back at Rastenburg had phoned to Fromm earlier: "Hitler is dead!" Fromm, never a man to enter uninformed into a pact, had unfortunately called Fieldmarshal Keitel at Rastenburg to make sure of Hitler's death immediately after Fellgiebel's message had arrived. He countered Stauffenberg, "Hitler is alive and you are all under arrest." Then Fromm had locked the crippled count in an office with the help of some of his own staff officers. For the rest of the afternoon and into the night Fromm had been conducting courtmartials throughout the building, hoping to dispose of anyone who could incriminate him. By his order General Beck, the former chief of the General Staff, had committed suicide, and General Hoepner, commander of the Fourth Army Group, had been carted off to Moabit Prison on the out-

skirts of the city. When he brushed by Skorzeny and Remer at 11:00 p.m. on the way out of the War Office, the conspiracy was effectively crushed.\*

## VII

Skorzeny spent the hours immediately after leaving von Stauffenberg's office rounding up and arresting anyone who seemed likely to have participated in the plot. The conspirators, few of them important enough to cast light on the situation since General Fromm had killed off all the bigwigs in the building, were escorted by Skorzeny's men to a Gestapo prison on the Prince Albrechtstrasse. The big commando then dispatched detectives through the building to look for incriminating papers such as the Valkyrie plan he had discovered in von Stauffenberg's office. It was a nasty business, but Skorzeny pursued it with a vengeance and in the process kept the promise he had made to himself on the way from General Student's villa.

It was three in the morning before SS security agents left the building for the last time. Skorzeny, too, was preparing to leave, eager to return to Freidenthal and sleep away the memory of the plot which so disgusted him. As he was strapping on his gunbelt and crushing out his fortieth cigarette of the day, a young, frightened officer approached him. "Major, we've received a call for reinforcements for the Eastern Front. We have the order ready... but there's no one to sign approval. What can we do?" Skorzeny looked

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\* NOTE: Fromm, despite his efforts, did not escape judgement for his part in the plot. Unknown to the General, all the false orders issued on July 20 had been signed with his name by over-eager young officers. Their anticipation of his approval led to Fromm's arrest. He was executed.



tiredly at the young face, "Well, where's your chief of staff?" The lieutenant blanched. "That would have been Colonel Stauffenberg, Sir." Skorzeny took the order and scribbled his initials across it. "There are more, sir, if you don't mind." Soon, Skorzeny was discovering to his dismay that hundreds of orders and requests were pouring into the War Office. With no one but a few harassed and inexperienced clerks around, there was nobody to approve them. The entire war effort was slowly grinding to a halt.

Immediately Skorzeny placed a call to Hitler's headquarters to request that a "safe" general officer be assigned to handle duties in the Bendlerstrasse. He was assured that one was on the way. But by dawn nobody had arrived. The commando called Rastenburg several more times, only to hear again that help was on the way. Until someone arrived he was "to use his own discretion."

So, for the next day and night, until the morning of July 22nd, the unbelievable occurred: a young commando major, aged 36, completely directed the German war effort. All the normal business of supply and advice was marshalled and directed by Otto Skorzeny. All German forces at home and in all of occupied Europe were under his control.

Finally, at 9 a.m. on July 22, thirty-four hours after he had entered the War Office, Skorzeny was relieved by another officer Hitler trusted completely: Heinrich Himmler. For the commando leader it had been a terrifying and revealing time since the young messenger had yelled, "Major Skorzeny!" outside his train compartment window. At Freidenthal, he tumbled exhausted into bed.

By the time Skorzeny awoke on July 23rd, there was a new atmosphere in Germany. Distrust was everywhere, especially in the mind of Hitler. The

Army was bitterly attacked on all sides as news of the conspiracy was heralded. Competent officers who might conceivably even be sympathetic to the plotters were removed from command and replaced by ardent Nazis. The silence of the Allies on the plot was taken for re-affirmation that they were bound and determined to destroy Germany no matter who ruled the Reich. Now it was a fight to the death.

HITLER'S TROJAN HORSE:

THE SECRET MISSIONS OF OTTO SKORZENY

Part Four:

"Enter Dr. Wolff"

The weeks following the attempt on Hitler's life and the subsequent crushing of the proposed military coup were busy ones for Skorzeny and the men at Freidenthal. Day after day was filled with the planning of one special mission after another as the plight of Germany grew increasingly desperate. Another 1800 recruits arrived from the battered Brandenburg Division and Hitler saw fit to burden his commandos with another undefinable task: the demoralization of the enemy.

Most planning was carried out with the full realization that probably the schemes involved would never be implemented. Skorzeny would receive orders to destroy a certain gasoline dump before the Allies could use it. But by the time he was able to mount an attacking force, the Allies had already advanced another twenty miles and had drained the dump in the process. Requests for commando raids against essential objectives had to be returned sorrowfully with the notation "too late for requested action." Some minor schemes, however, were carried off. Attacks against Allied shipping using the "Niggers" were again successful to a small degree, as were nighttime infiltration attacks against the advancing Red Armies in the Balkans by members of Skorzeny's unit who spoke fluent Russian. A desperate attempt to rescue trapped German troops far behind the Soviet lines, though, was a depressing failure as the vast Russian forests swallowed company after company of Skorzeny's paratroopers without a word.

As the middle of September neared, Skorzeny was called repeatedly to Hitler's headquarters in order to take part in the Führer's daily briefing sessions. A good background knowledge of the overall situation was essential if Skorzeny was to understand the reasoning behind his future missions. Or

at least that's what Jodl told him when he summoned the big commando to the Wolf's Lair.

Skorzeny found the briefing sessions depressing, especially when it became obvious to him that Hitler had become, as he later told Radl, "a physical and moral wreck". The Führer trusted no one since the July 20th plot. Whatever confidence he had had in the General Staff had been swept away on that day, just as the bomb explosion had shattered his nerves and made it necessary for him to receive daily doses of tranquilizers from a quack physician. More often than not he would interrupt his briefings to reminisce about his day as an infantryman in the First World War. When brought back to reality by his generals, who needed quick counsel and decisions about the course of the present war, he would fly into a tantrum, sweeping his colored map pencils to the floor and screaming "Cowards! Cowards! You are all cowards!"

One noonday briefing session was especially turbulent. The Reich's Foreign Minister, von Ribbentrop, was present, looking like a hunted man. It was obvious that Hitler was going to rake him over the coals for the failure of Germany to hold on to its Allies in the Balkans such as Romania and Yugoslavia...a failure von Ribbentrop could have done nothing to prevent. Diplomacy was no match for advancing Red Armies.

Hitler began a sarcastic speech:

"Gentlemen, I have amazing news for you. At last the stupidity of the General Staff has been surpassed, a feat I did not believe possible. But, yes, now our diplomats have gone one better." Hitler paused, then looked dramatically at von Ribbentrop, who was turning paler by the second. "They have thrown away my one remaining ally to the Russians, they have brought down my last bastion. In fact, they have probably lost the war for me!"



The others present adopted varying poses of indifference. Keitel and Jodl gazed at the ceiling, while Himmler stared off into the distance. Skorzeny tried to make his six feet four frame as inconspicuous as possible, no easy feat. Hitler continued:

"That last ally was Hungary! If Hungary goes, then Germany will fall! It is our last major source of oil, of grain, of bauxite for our jet planes! But that's not all...if Hungary falls to the communist hoardes then we will lose seventy divisions, cut off in the Carpathians! Then Italy, Greece... all of our territory will be lost. The Red Army will pour across the Danube plains into Austria." He continued endlessly.

The listening Skorzeny could not understand Hitler's great pessimism about Hungary. True, if Hungary fell the events would be more as he described them. But Hungary was safe at present. Her armies were linked with those of Germany in the Carpathians, fighting together against the Russians. What could be Hitler's reasoning for the attack on von Ribbentrop? The dictator rushed on:

"Our diplomats have allowed Germany to be betrayed by someone outside my reach. Admiral Horthy, that weak puppet, is now a traitor to our cause! He has been trafficking with the enemy, with the Russians! He plans to surrender his armies and his country to them in exchange for worthless political concessions!"

Suddenly, he turned to a surprised Skorzeny. "You, Skorzeny, will deal with this Admiral Horthy. You are to prepare the military occupation of the Burgberg, Castle Hill, in Budapest. You will start this operation as soon as we learn that the Regent has betrayed the duties incumbent upon him according to his treaty of alliance with Germany."

Evidently, everyone else present had been previously informed of Skorzeny's

mission, for with a final glare at von Ribbentrop to show that his tantrum was over, Hitler gestured to Jodl, who began to read to the astonished commando from an obviously pre-prepared sheet a list of the units at his disposal.

"You will have a battalion of paratroops from the Luftwaffe, the 600th Battalion of paratroops from the Waffen SS, and a battalion of motorized infantry from the Officer Training School at Wiener Neustadt. Further, two squadrons of gliders will be transferred to Vienna and placed under your orders. For the duration of this operation, a plane from the squadron detailed to the Führer's headquarters will be given you for your personal movements."

Then Hitler passed over to Skorzeny a crisp sheet of notepaper, surmounted by the German eagle and engraved with the words "Führer and Chancellor of the Reich." On it was typed the most liberal and unrestricted grant of power perhaps ever issued by a chief of state:

Major Skorzeny of the Reserve Corps has been charged directly by myself with secret and personal orders of the highest importance. All personnel, military and civil, will assist Major Skorzeny by every means and will comply with all his wishes.

(Signed) A. Hitler

With that the briefing came almost immediately to a close, and one by one the men filtered out of the room. The entire meeting, including the temper tantrum, had been solely for Skorzeny's benefit, in order to impress upon him the urgency of his mission. The big commando found himself alone in the room, deserted except for the scrap of paper in his hand. He looked at it for a moment, then crumpled it away in his pocket.

Then the enormity of his mission struck him. Ever since his boyhood days

in Vienna, Horthy had ruled over the neighboring survivor of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, a link to the old days of the Emperor Franz Joseph. He had said once, "I am the state," and it was true, even if he wasn't the crowned king of his kingdom and even if he was an admiral with no fleet at his disposal. He ruled with an iron hand. How on earth could the commando topple his rule and still leave the country intact as an ally of Germany?

There were other problems, too. The Régent commanded Hungary from his castle on a hill overlooking Budapest. It was impregnable. Surrounded by troops, machine guns, and mines, the walled fortress on the Burgberg could only be reached by crossing through the Vienna Gates, an ornate entranceway which could be sealed off in a moment's notice to make Horthy's domain a separate world apart from the teeming city far below.

Now, the commando giant reflected gloomily, he was being asked to pull off another feat like the Mussolini abduction. Except this time there would be no isolated Gran Sasso, no preponderance of German troops to come to his aid, no insignificant amount of hostile troops to contend with. The seizure of Castle Hill would take place in a large, populous city where Hungarian troops outnumbered Germans by three to one. Horthy's men would be ready and waiting. Skorzeny shook his head and wearily sought out a telephone to inform Radl and von Folkersam what was up.

## II

A few days after the dramatic noonday briefing at Rastenburg, a large man in civilian clothes stepped off one of the few still operating commercial

flights between Berlin and Budapest. In his pocket were papers proclaiming him to be a Dr. Wolff from Cologne, a professor at that city's school of engineering. Hailing a taxi, the man drove quietly to a small private residence in the center of the city, far from the military hotels used by German officers and dignitaries passing through the Hungarian capital. As he stepped from the cab, few passers-by noticed the long scar which formed a crescent between his left eyebrow and his chin. Soon, he was safely inside and unpacking his scant baggage. Within an hour, guidebook in hand, Otto Skorzeny was gazing at the fine homes and ministries which lined the streets in the neighborhood of Horthy's mountaintop abode.

Five days before he adopted the role of tourist, Skorzeny had been urgently organizing a strike force for the Horthy mission at his headquarters at Freidenthal. He had called von Folkersam and Radl from Rastenburg immediately after the briefing at which Hitler had selected him to clear up the Hungarian problem, and the two men had spent the hours until their chief's return preparing the First Company for transport to a Vienna airfield. The men had been extremely curious about the nature of their new assignment, but Skorzeny had decided that even a phone line from Führer headquarters was not sufficiently safe to risk such important information. They had had to be content with a set of noncommittal, but intriguing, orders: "Triple the usual issue of ammunition and add complete equipment for four sections of dynamiters. Each man is to receive six days' rations."

Their curiosity had been assuaged when Skorzeny landed at Berlin's Tempelhof airfield at noon the next day. He was met by Radl, von Folkersam, and Ostafel, the young orderly who had chauffeured him around during the July 20th crisis. Von Folkersam immediately assured him that the First

Company had left for Vienna not fifteen minutes before he himself had landed. As the four officers drove back to Freidenthal, Skorzeny briefed them on their mission. Radl whistled with amazement, while von Folkersam and Ostafel nodded their heads in excitement. They agreed eagerly to Skorzeny's suggestion that their troops be totally motorized. Radl especially thought the idea a wonderful one, for the young captain who had so enjoyed "borrowing" supplies during the early days of the commando school was looking forward to wrangling trucks and other vehicles from the notoriously tight-fisted Transportation Command.

At Freidenthal the men gathered up their gear, including a case of the newest explosive turned out by the army's laboratories. Then they boarded a plane for Vienna as their men had done and within hours touched down on the outskirts of Skorzeny's boyhood home.

In Vienna Skorzeny found the troops Jodl had promised him. The Luftwaffe paratroops were in excellent shape, ready for any sort of action, as were the 1000 officer cadets from Wiener Neustadt. But the Waffen SS paratroops had just returned from hard combat on the Eastern Front and were in poor condition. They were in no mood for secret operations or constant alerts, reported their commander to von Folkersam. Then von Folkersam told him who the commander of the operation would be. At the magic name of "Skorzeny" the men rallied instantly, eager to serve the man who had become a legend not only in their own Waffen SS, but in the rest of the services as well.

As soon as the problem of motorization had been solved, equipping the men with trucks, motorcycles, and light armored cars, Radl and Skorzeny left for Budapest by separate routes. Von Folkersam and Ostafel left later in the day by road.



## III

Skorzeny's first contact on reaching Budapest was SS General Dr. Edmund Veessenmayer, the German "minister" to Hungary. Veessenmayer gave the commando an interesting bit of information: it was not the old admiral who had to be watched closely, but his son, young Miklos "Miki" Horthy. Miki was known as the enfant terrible of the Horthy family, a wild playboy whose parties were sometimes the biggest orgies in Europe. Since the death of his older brother on the Eastern Front, Miki had been both the hope and despair of his father. Now, with his father's consent, he had been secretly meeting with an emissary of the Yugoslav partisan leader, Tito, Skorzeny's old quarry and at present Stalin's stand-in in the Balkans, to arrange the surrender of Hungary to the Russians. Veessenmayer asked for Skorzeny's help in trapping the Regent's son at one of the clandestine meetings. Skorzeny quickly agreed and assigned von Folkersam and Ostafel to Veessenmayer's staff to help coordinate planning. Soon, an operation known as "Mickey Mouse" had been formulated, its object the kidnapping of Miki Horthy.

For several weeks the villa where Horthy was known to meet with Tito's agent was watched closely, but the young man, perhaps out of caution, stayed away. Then, word came that the young playboy would meet on October 10 with the emissary. Skorzeny and his men, accompanied by Gestapo agents, lay in wait. The paratroops and infantry battalions, which were to be saved for the main assault on Castle Hill should such a move be necessary, were quartered two blocks away, ready to be called should Horthy's protection be more than anticipated. Several members of Skorzeny's First Company had been smuggled into the upper floors of the villa, prepared at a moments notice to sweep down on the unsuspecting Miki the instant he entered the building. All

was in readiness.

On the bright, crisp autumn morning of October 10th, an official staff car of the Hungarian army pulled up outside the villa. As expected, the young Horthy climbed out and, after glancing around, was apparently convinced that no one was watching him. Then, to the eager Skorzeny's shock, he turned back to the car and helped a bent figure out of the back seat. It was his father, the Regent. Skorzeny, who had been briefed by Hitler not to start his action against Castle Hill and the Regent himself until after Horthy had, in fact, already surrendered to the Russians, could do nothing. Bitterly disappointed, the commando quietly made the rounds of his men, who were hidden in alleys and nearby buildings, telling them to disperse quickly in small groups and make their way back to their headquarters as unobtrusively as possible. His men on the upper floor of the villa had seen the Regent being assisted out of the car by his son, and were already scampering over nearby rooftops and down lattices to vanish from the scene before Miki could be aware of his second floor visitors.

#### IV

Skorzeny was disgusted by the October 10th fiasco, but he didn't have time to brood about it. The Gestapo learned that the morning's meeting had been fruitful, and a final session was set for the following Sunday, October 15th. This time the meeting would take place in the middle of downtown Budapest in an office building, while local residents and visitors would be strolling for quiet morning walks. Miki Horthy was scheduled to come alone.

Skorzeny positioned his men carefully, as he had done four days before, in nearby alleys and back lots, away from the curious gaze of passers-by. At ten o'clock, Horthy drove up to the building in a Mercedes, dressed in civilian clothes. Across the street, lounging a bit too casually to escape Skorzeny's notice, were several Hungarian officers.

As the young man climbed out of his car and walked quickly towards the building's entrance, Skorzeny and his men swooped down on him. Startled, he rushed inside the building's foyer, but the big commando caught up with him and wrestled him to the floor. Then von Folkersam charged through the door and joined the two squirming men on the carpet. Horthy, screaming and kicking, hurling vows of vengeance, was pinned by Skorzeny's huge bulk as a crowd of soldiers pushed and shoved their way into the hall.

Across the street, the Hungarian officers had come to life. Drawing their pistols and taking cover behind parked cars and nearby telephone poles, they opened fire at the German troops clustered in the building's doorway. Inside, Skorzeny's commandos flattened against the floor and jockeyed with each other for firing positions. Bullets whistled across the street as families out for a Sunday stroll screamed and ran for cover.

Inside the building, Skorzeny and von Folkersam were still struggling with young Horthy. They dragged him to the end of the entrance hall, as far away from the open door as possible. Then Skorzeny jerked him erect and hit him cleanly on the jaw with a massive fist. Horthy crumbled into von Folkersam's arms. Looking around quickly for something with which to bind the limp figure, Skorzeny's eyes fell on a curtain rope dangling from an ornamental set of drapes in the hall. As he jerked the rope down, von

Folkersam placed Horthy's dead weight diagonally on the foyer's Persian rug and began rolling the young man up in the carpet. Skorzeny returned with the cord and wrapped it securely around the cylindrical bundle, then tied it with a flourish. Now to get their victim, and themselves, safely out of the building and away.

Suddenly the street was filled with more firing as a truck bearing a company of the Luftwaffe paratroops arrived. Radl, about to lead a unit of men into the building before the firing had first broken out, had hopped aboard a motorcycle instead when he saw his commander trapped inside and had roared off to the quarters of the tough "Fallschirmjäger." Now he was back, trailing behind the troopers in an open staff car.

Using the truck as cover, Skorzeny's men overflowed from the building and out into the street, firing wildly at the scurrying Hungarian officers. One man went down, wounded in the thigh. Bullets ricocheted off cars and curbing as they missed their mark. Slowly but surely the Germans were driving the Hungarians back down the street and away from the precious cargo now rolled in the rug.

As the Hungarians were falling back, Skorzeny grasped the moment to fling the concooned Horthy across his shoulder. He ran out into the street, followed by von Folkersam, who was supporting the tail end of the rug, and together the two men tossed the now squirming bundle into the back seat of the staff car driven by Radl. Then they dived in on top of it and Skorzeny's plump aide pushed the gas pedal to the floor. As the car rounded the corner, the paratroops also decided to clear out. Firing continuously at the Hungarians, they clambered back aboard the truck, which immediately made a u-turn in the street and zoomed off in the opposite direction from the one Radl had taken. The Hungarians were left standing looking in both directions

as dazed civilians pulled themselves up from the pavement.

## V

Skorzeny, von Folkersam, and Radl headed for an airfield just outside the city, their cargo screaming and twisting in his carpet overcoat. There they were met by several airman, who quickly shouldered the rug and its occupant and threw it uncerimoniously aboard the aircraft which Skorzeny had been assigned by the Führer's headquarters. Its propellers already turning (for it had been warned to be ready anytime after ten that morning), the plane was soon airborne and on its way to Vienna. Operation "Mickey Mouse" was a success.

## VI

Now the enemy was time. Admiral Horthy, enraged by the kidnapping of his son, summarily informed the German "minister" Veesenmayer that he was negotiating with the Allies for a surrender, and less than an hour later the Regent's voice was booming from radio sets all over Hungary. He had, heard a largely skeptical audience, just concluded a separate peace with the Soviets. Hungarian units fighting in the Carpathians were to lay down their arms immediately.

Of course, it was all a hoax. No such peace had been concluded, and the Russians were hopping mad about it. Now, they told Horthy, he had till



the following morning, October 16th, at 8 a.m. to accept their terms. All through the night of the 15th, Horthy and his advisors argued without reaching a conclusion. Finally, the admiral went to bed in disgust. His ministers continued to debate, and at 2:30 a.m. decided that it would be best if they all fled to Germany to seek asylum before any direct, front-line confrontation with the Russians could take place. Horthy must abdicate, they agreed, and sent one of their number, a man named Vattay, to inform the Regent of their decision.

But the Admiral, who had been a power in Hungary for generations, was loathe to give up his position as absolute ruler. He told the messenger angrily that the ministers could do with their decision. Then he went back to bed. But Vattay was a weak and cowardly man who disliked being the bearer of bad news. He reported back to his friends and calmly told them that Horthy had accepted their proposal "in its entirety." The ministers immediately informed Vessenmayer of the plan, and the German promised them a quick reply from Berlin.

But it took Vessenmayer over an hour to get Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop on the phone. Von Ribbentrop, in turn, said that Hitler personally would have to approve the abdication of Horthy and the granting of asylum in Germany for the members of the late government. Finally, at 5:15 in the morning, Vessenmayer received approval of the plan from the Führer. By 5:30, the German had arrived at Castle Hill to take Horthy into custody. The Admiral, meanwhile, had finally been informed of what was going on, and was adamantly refusing to abdicate. But when Vessenmayer's arrival was announced, he finally give in, and at 5:38 the old man drove off to Austria in the company of the SS general.

Unfortunately, no one bothered to tell Skorzeny what had transpired during the night. On the afternoon of the 15th, after putting young Miki Horthy on the plane for Vienna, he had returned to German Army Headquarters outside Budapest. There he was informed by the commanding general, an SS officer named Winklemann, that the elder Horthy had to be removed from power before the Hungarian surrender to the Russians could take effect. For the rest of the afternoon and evening, as Horthy's ministers were deciding on a less violent course, Skorzeny was planning how best to seize the formidably defended Burgberg. By early morning, he had a plan: all the men at his disposal-- the paratroopers, the officer cadets, his own First Company from Freidenthal-- would form a long motorized column in their trucks and armored cars. The column would then roll peacefully and self-assuredly up the hill of the Burgberg until it reached the Vienna Gates, the entrance to the Horthy fortress. There, if challenged, the men would mount a major attack. But Skorzeny hoped that his men could put on a good enough show of acting to convince the guards that they were going "someplace where they had every right to be." The guards, assuming higher approval for such an above-board display of force near their leader's headquarters, would let the Skorzeny group pass unmolested through the gates and into the fortress. If the ruse didn't work, Skorzeny was sure, the result would be bloody on both sides. But it was the best he could think of in lieu of a glider operation which would almost certainly be foredoomed by the land mines scattered so freely among the hill's only open areas.

At 5:59 Skoraeny raised his arm and then brought it down in direction of Castle Hill. The column began to move. Thirty minutes later the Horthy fortress was in Skorzeny's hands. At the cost of 7 dead and 26 wounded (for his

ruse had been detected immediately after the last of his men had crossed through the Gates) he had captured the Burgberg - uselessly.

The Horthy affair was over.

HITLER'S TROJAN HORSE:

THE SECRET MISSIONS OF OTTO SKORZENY

Part Five:

"Operation 'GREIF'"

By September of 1944, it was obvious that Germany was almost through. Allied advances in France and Holland had pushed the Wehrmacht back to the borders of the Fatherland. On the Eastern Front, the Russians were hammering away less than fifty miles from the Führer's headquarters at Rastenburg. To Hitler's generals it was obvious that German's leader was nearing the point of total physical and mental collapse. The effects of the July 20th bomb plot were obvious: The Führer walked with a limp, holding his left arm stiffly against his side. His eyes were watery and distant, his frame stooped. He had taken recently to spending most of the day in bed.

Now, as the September 16th noonday military briefing came to a close, Hitler asked several of his most trustworthy generals to stay behind. The Führer led them to his inner chambers, then disappeared through a side door to receive his daily medication from his quack physician, Dr. Theodor Morell. Left standing in the room were Fieldmarshal Wilhelm Keitel, the Supreme Commander of the Wehrmacht; Chief of OKW Operations General Alfred Jodl; Heinz Guderian, the famous Panzer commander; and General Werner Kreipe, Goering's representative. Idly, the men wondered what was up.

Then Hitler re-entered the room. What he wanted, he said, was a realistic assessment of the situation, not just a lot of meaningless words like the ones he had just heard in the regular briefing. The men stirred uneasily. It was true that they had been feeding Hitler false reports for some time. They were afraid he couldn't take the really bad news.

After a moment's pause Jodl, below Keitel in rank but the holder of Hitler's confidence, began to present the time situation. On the Eastern Front, Romania had fallen completely to the Russians. Army Group Mitte reported that the Soviets had advanced as far as the Vistula. Bulgaria had also fallen



prey to the advancing Red armies, and even worse, had now joined in the fight against Germany. But it was believed that the Russian attack had quieted and that no more offensives would be launched by them until January. In the North, the loss of Finland had not really hurt the Reich. In fact, noted Jodl, a number of good mountain divisions should be released soon for duty on other European fronts. In the South, the news wasn't so good. Italy, reported Fieldmarshal Kesselring, was lost for good. Some German troops could be salvaged...maybe. The Jodl turned to the Western Front. Things had slowed down a bit. The allied attacks were waning as efforts were made to improve stretched supply lines. Further attacks could be expected soon, though, and then it would be only a matter of time before Germany itself was invaded. Turning to the condition of German troops on the Western Front, Jodl reported that in the last three months, 600,000 casualties had been suffered in the battle for France. "But we're getting a real rest in the Ardennes."

At the word "Ardennes" Hitler suddenly raised his hand and cried "Stop!" A silence of two minutes followed before he spoke again. "I have made a momentous decision. I am taking the offensive. Here - out of the Ardennes!" He brought his fist down sharply on the map in front of him. "Across the Meuse and on to Antwerp!"

The generals stared at him, astonished. Gone was the sick Hitler they were accustomed to. Standing in front of them now was the old Hitler, the Hitler of 1940, with squared back and shining eyes.

## II

Planning continued for the counter-offensive through September and into

October. On October 11, General Jodl presented Hitler with a plan symbolically called "Christrose." It called for a German breakthrough on a wide front, followed by the crossing the Meuse River on the second day of the attack and the seizure of Antwerp by the seventh day. The next day the High Command issued an order to confuse Allied Intelligence. Signed by Keitel, it informed commanders on the Western Front that no German counter-offensive was possible for several more months, and that it was their duty to stifle rumors of an early victory by the Wehrmacht. On October 21, Jodl handed Hitler the completed plan, which was quickly dubbed by the Führer, "Watch on the Rhine." The next day Hitler sent for the one man he thought could capture intact the Meuse River bridges. "Get me Skorzeny."

Skorzeny arrived that afternoon in Rastenburg. Ushered into the now familiar inner offices of the Führer, he saw before him the changed Hitler who had so surprised the High Command a month before.

Announcing that he had awarded the commando the German Cross in gold for his part in the Horthy affair, Hitler motioned Skorzeny to sit down. "Tell me about it - this Operation 'Mickey Mouse'". Skorzeny launched into a colorful relation of the kidnapping, and Hitler laughed often. Finishing the story, the giant rose from his chair and prepared to leave.

"Stay, Skorzeny. I am going to charge you with a new mission, perhaps the most important in your life." Skorzeny lowered himself back into his chair.

"So far, very few people know that we are preparing in utmost secrecy a mission in which you are to play a principle part. In December, the German Army will launch a great offensive, the issue of which will be decisive in the destiny of our country." Hitler then told Skorzeny in great length about

the coming offensive, excitedly revealing to the commando that 2000 of Germany's new jet fighter aircraft would take part. Then he explained the reasoning behind the attack.

"The Allies look on Germany as a corpse. A corpse whose final burial is now just a question of time. If you listen to their radio, you'd believe that they could choose the day of the funeral at will. They do not see that Germany is fighting for Europe, that she is sacrificing herself for Europe in order to bar the road to the Occident to Asia!" Hitler went on bitterly:

"If we can strike a blow to the West, then their leaders will give into the public, who will believe that they have been hoodwinked by all the talk of a quick victory. Then the Allies will conclude an armistice with this 'corpse' that proves so lively. Then we can throw all our divisions, all our armies into battle on the Eastern Front and, in a few months, liquidate the frightful communist threat that weighs over Europe." Skorzeny sat entranced, his spirits rising with every word.

"As for you and the units under your orders, we have chosen for you one of the most difficult tasks within the framework of this offensive. As advance groups, you will have to occupy one or several bridges on the Meuse between Liege and Namur. You will carry out this mission thanks to a stratagem: your men will wear British and American uniforms. Thanks to the same ruse the enemy has been able to inflict serious damage on us in several commando raids; for instance, a few days ago, when we took Aix-la-Chapelle, an American detachment, wearing German uniforms, was able to slip through our lines. Similarly, small groups of your men in enemy uniform, once they have passed behind enemy lines, will be expected to issue false orders, to hamper communications, and, in a general way, to throw the Allied troops into con-

fusion. I have given your mission the name Operation 'Grief'. Your preparations must be completed by December first. As for details, you will see General Jodl."

Skorzeny was totally taken aback. The plan was so audacious, so unexpected, that it just might work. Who could suspect that the crumbling hulk of Germany would try such an offensive? Eagerly, he promised Hitler that he would do his best. But one matter bothered him. "I don't know if I can set up more than just a rough improvisation in the time I have to work with." Hitler nodded his head in understanding.

"I know that's true, but in five or six weeks we must attack. I know that you will do your best. And, remember, Skorzeny, while of course you yourself will be at the front when the time comes for your troops to go into action, I forbid you to go into action. We cannot afford to lose you..." With that he sent Skorzeny to see General Jodl. As the towering commando approached the door, Hitler called to him, "There's one more thing. For such a command, I think you should have an appropriate rank. Lieutenant Colonel should do nicely." Hitler smiled at Skorzeny's spontaneous grin. "Off with you now, Colonel."

Skorzeny found Jodl in the humming office of the OKW. Typewriters clicked and phones rang constantly as a flustered aide motioned Skorzeny to go right in. The slight, balding general was pouring over maps when Skorzeny quietly entered his cubicle, closing the door behind him.

"Ah, Skorzeny. You seem to have your work cut out for you, don't you?" Jodl leaned over his maps, gesturing Skorzeny to come closer. "You will go into action here, around Malmedy. Your men will hopefully seize the major road

intersections, then move on to the Meuse. I'll see that you get complete orders in the next day or so." Abruptly, Jodl straightened up. "I'd like to give you more time, but as you can see, I'm very busy now. Go talk to Keitel, he can tell you more. Oh, and try to submit a list of what personnel and material you'll need in the next couple of days."

Skorzeny wandered back out into the office in search of Keitel. He found him two doors down, closeted with his side, Colonel Karl Boehm-Tettel Bach. The stout commander of the Wehrmacht seemed, if possible, even more busy than Jodl. Quickly, he briefed Skorzeny on the rough operational plan. The commandos would be assigned to the 6th Panzer Army under Sepp Dietrich. This was good news for the big Austrian. Dietrich had been the commander of Skorzeny's first division, the Liebenstandarte Adolf Hitler. Although coarse and sometimes brutal, the hard-drinking Dietrich was loved by his men, who would follow him anywhere. Again, Skorzeny found himself being promised complete orders in a day or so. Had Jodl told him to prepare a list of his needs? Yes? "Then, really," intoned Keitel, "that's all I can do for you. We'll get you English speaking men from other units. I'll issue the order myself, so don't worry. Also, I'll try to get you some vehicles."

Skorzeny left the Wolf's Lair on the first plane he could find to Berlin. A staff car took him from Templehof to Freidenthal, where he informed the curious Radl on the rough details of the mission. Then, the two men began putting together a list of what they needed. Finally, four days later on October 26, a finished list was sent to the High Command. In it, Skorzeny and Radl requested everything they thought would be needed for an effective strike force:



- 1 tank Company - Ten tanks
- 3 Reconnaissance Companies - 10 armored cars each
- 2 motorized Infantry Battalions - 1 heavy weapon company each
- 1 light artillery Company
- 2 Reconnaissance Companies
- 1 Battalion Artillery
- 1 Signal/Communication Company

Or, as Radl figured it, about 2700 men to make up their group, which had been divided into two units: the "150th Panzer Brigade" for the disguised armored vehicles which would cause confusion on the battle line itself; and the "Sonderkommandos," or "special units" of commandos who would spread confusion behind the lines. For command responsibilities, there was to be a set of battalion staffs under one brigade staff.

On October 28, Skorzeny received his orders. He was to seize the key roads leading out of Trois Ponts, Vielsalm, and Roche a Frone, Belgium, and then to infiltrate his disguised troops down these roads to the Meuse River bridges at Amay, Hue, and Andenne. There, disguised as Americans, select groups of commandos would prevent the bridges from being blown in the ensuing American retreat, and would hold them until they could be relieved by their "American" armored units. Elements of his unit would be expected to cut American communication lines, broadcast false messages, conduct forward reconnaissance for the advancing 6th Panzer Army, and generally cause confusion among the enemy. Everything relied on the completeness of his deception. Enemy vehicles, armor, and uniforms were requested from the high command. Secrecy was imperative.

Then, on October 30, Keitel issued the order he had promised Skorzeny. The big Austrian exploded, for there, for all the world to see, was a dead giveaway to the Americans of what was going on:

The Führer has ordered the formation of a special unit of a strength of about two battalions for employment on reconnaissance and special tasks on the Western Front. The personnel will be assembled from volunteers of all arms of the army and Waffen SS, who must fulfill the following requirements:

- (a) Physically A.1, suitable for special tasks, mentally keen, strong personality.
- (b) Fully trained in single combat.
- (c) Knowledge of the English language and also the American dialect. Especially important is a knowledge of military technical terms.

This order is to be made known immediately to all units and headquarters. Volunteers may not be retained on military grounds but are to be sent immediately to Freidenthal near Oranienburg (Headquarters Skorzeny) for a test of suitability, but a value will be put on his fighting spirit and temperament.

Captured U.S. clothing, equipment, weapons and vehicles are to be collected and reported for the equipment of the above special troops. Personal wishes of the troops to make use of this kind of captured equipment must take second priority. Details will be notified later...

Skorzeny immediately sat down and wrote out a message to the High Command, condemning the blunder and requesting that his mission be cancelled. Now that the secret had been advertised, he wrote, it would be foolish to go on.

Luckily for Skorzeny, the Waffen SS liason at OKW headquarters was General Hermann Fegelin, an ex-jockey who was married to Eva Braun's sister. He called the commando leader as soon as the message came in. "Skorzeny, don't be a fool! Where's your realism? 'on't you know that to cancel you now would mean going to the Führer? How can we tell him that such a mistake has been made? It would cause trouble for everyone!" Skorzeny still hadn't learned the ways of bureaucrats. Grudgingly, he gave into Fegelin's reasoning. "But if this sort of thing happens again, I'll go to the Führer, no matter who gets in trouble!"

But Skorzeny had no time to brood over the order. Recruits were coming in daily by the hundreds, drawn by the magic of the "giant of Freidenthal." Supposedly, the men were to have a good knowledge of English, but a despairing Skorzeny soon learned otherwise. The men were ready for anything - except a language test. Most could only mumble "Yes" or "No" when asked to demonstrate their proficiency. One young Luftwaffe flier had written on his application that his English was "very good". Delighted, Skorzeny called the man to his office. "Tell me about yourself in English, please." The young man visibly grew embarrassed, hesitated, then blurted out: "Yes, Herr Oberstleutnant, I became my last order before five months." He hesitated again, then added hurriedly in German: "If you will allow me, I will explain all that in my native tongue..."

There was nothing for Skorzeny to do except to be cheerful about it. He couldn't heap abuse on such eager volunteers. He confided to Radl, "I don't think we'll ever dupe an American...not even a deaf one. I suppose what we'll end up doing is mingling with the fleeing American columns with teeth-clenched as though deprived of the power of speech."

The men were divided into groups on the basis of how well they spoke English. Group I was made up of men, mostly sailors, who had traveled abroad and spoke the language well. In its entirety, this first category numbered ten men. The second group counted some thirty to forty men who were more or less fluent in English. The third category, soldiers who could "make themselves understood", had 150 men. The final category had some two hundred men who hadn't completely forgotten what they'd learned in school. These were the ones who could remember "Yes" and "No" and "How are you?".

The bulk of Skorzeny's men, over two thousand of those who would comprise his 150th Panzer Brigade's armor and artillery units, knew no English at all.

A strenuous program of "Americanization" was devised. Daily lectures and language drills were implemented, bolstered by captured American training films. American rank insignia and unit symbols were ingrained on the men's minds, no easy task since the German army had few comparable ratings and designations. Skorzeny would walk down lines of men, begging them, "Relax, relax!" The German soldier couldn't get used to abandoning his stiff posture and heel-clicking. The men were taught how to chew gum and open packs of cigarettes in the "American way" (Americans tear the foil towards them, Germans away). But because no American uniforms or vehicles had yet arrived, the men could not be sure what their mission was, and Skorzeny, bound by secrecy, could not reveal the plan until just before it was to go into effect. As a result, rumors spread like wildfire through the Freidenthal base, a problem which was arising all over Germany as units were assembled without explanation for the assault.

One day while Skorzeny was sitting in his office, one of his brigade commanders, a colonel named Hardieck, knocked on the door. Skorzeny motioned him to come in and noticed that the man seemed very upset. "What's wrong?" inquired the big commando. "It's the men, sir. I'm afraid these rumors are getting out of hand. Pretty soon we're sure to have a security leak." Skorzeny, who had been too wrapped up in planning the operation to also listen for rumors, asked Hardieck to go on. "We've got almost 3000 men here. Because of security, none of them can write or receive letters and it's been like that for nearly a month now. All these courses in English and all the training about American units and mannerisms...the men are dying of curiosity."

Skorzeny nodded understandingly. "What are they saying?" Hardieck launched into a list of the rumors he had heard just that day. The brigade would cross the whole of France to free the German garrison besieged in Brest; the commandos would relieve the blockade of Lorient. Plans had been seen which would send the unit rushing to relieve the Dunkirk pocket...in all, a half dozen of the wildest possible stories Skorzeny could imagine. The big Austrian pondered for a moment, then decided that nothing could be done about them without revealing their true mission, something he was not prepared to do at present. "Let them talk, Hardieck...but report to me anything that sounds too close to the real thing. Also, it might be a good idea to act surprised and upset at anything you hear."

The next day Skorzeny had a chance to put his advice to work himself. A young captain in his headquarters company requested an urgent interview. Ushered into Skorzeny's office, the captain declared solemnly, "Colonel, I know the purpose of the operation we are preparing." For a moment, Skorzeny sat perplexed. Could Radl, Hardieck, or his other brigade commander, von Foelkersam, have let slip their orders? But before he could come to a conclusion, the captain whispered, "The brigade is going to march to Paris in order to capture Allied G.H.Q. and Eisenhower."

Skorzeny almost exploded trying to contain his laughter. He flushed red, then blurted out an indefinite, "Hm! Hm!" The Captain, now encouraged, continued, "As I know every inch of Paris, I should like to offer my help, Colonel. Naturally I shall keep mum about this."

Skorzeny asked him for suggestions. Immediately the captain launched into a detailed plan: a column of German prisoners, guarded by English-speaking members of the brigade, would march into Paris. Even German tanks



would take part, as booty to be displayed to the Allied command. As soon as they were inside the gates of Allied G.H.Q., the men would seize the staff, and Eisenhower, and flee the city. Skorzeny listened intently, then asked the captain for more time to study the plan. "Come back to see me, and especially be sure not to talk to anyone about this!" As expected, the tale was all over the base by the next day. There, thought Skorzeny, that's something for U.S. Intelligence to mull over! Later, U.S. Intelligence would indeed mull over it, and their reaction would not be one of laughter\*.

## III

By the end of November Skorzeny had, at last, received American uniforms, guns and vehicles...but in varying lots and quality. \* Two U.S. Sherman tanks arrived, one of which broke down almost immediately. Apologetic, the High Command sent him 12 German "Panther" tanks, disguised with sheet metal to resemble American tanks and painted with a white star. Radl tried to be encouraging. "We might get away with it...if we're ten miles away in the twilight."

Ten armored cars arrived, but six were British. Skorzeny puzzled over

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\* NOTE: "Greif" in German is a mythical bird, but it can also mean "grab". The kidnapping rumor was a natural outgrowth of the mission's codeword, which was known by all the troops.

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\* NOTE: Fieldmarshal von Rundstedt (C-in-Chief West) refused to comply with the High Command's request for captured material until he had been explicitly reassured that the mission of the 150th Panzer Brigade would not exceed a simple ruse de guerre.

how to use them in an American sector. Finally he gave up and sent them back. German vehicles, disguised with sheet metal like the tanks, would have to do. Next, thirty jeeps came in, and a pleasant surprise but still not as many as hoped for. Two weeks before, Skorzeny had seen practically all of his officer friends driving them around, but now they had all disappeared. Nearby barns yielded several more.

Fifteen trucks were delivered. Several broke down immediately and had to be replaced by German Fords painted green with white stars. The High Command consoled Skorzeny with hopes that more could be picked up when the Americans abandoned them in battle. Guns and ammunition came in freight cars, but the ammunition blew up the next day when it was improperly unloaded. The guns would equip half of Skorzeny's men. The other half were issued German weapons.

Meanwhile Skorzeny had been traveling back and forth to Hitler's headquarters, which had been moved away from the advancing Russians and back to Berlin, for briefings on the progress of the overall effort for the offensive. The attack, first scheduled for December first, had been put off until December tenth because many of the units scheduled to take part were not prepared. At one briefing he was told that only 250 of the new Me-262 jet fighters would take part in the offensive. What, he wondered, had happened to the 2000 Hitler had promised him on October 22? Immediately, he made up his mind on two points: the seizure of the Meuse River Bridges, already made nearly impossible by a lack of time and adequately train his men, would only be attempted if (1) the enemy front had given way and (2) if the German advance had already penetrated far behind the Allied lines. In any other situation, it would be folly to squander useful fighting men for such a gamble.

Skorzeny also received some useful advice at headquarters. An army lawyer, Hans Bokelberg, told him that the commandos, if captured in American uniform, would be shot as spies immediately by the Allies. Bokelberg advised the big Austrian to warn his men to wear German uniforms under their disguises. As soon as the shooting started they should strip off their Khaki and revert back to German field-grey. It could not be assumed that the Allied would regard his mission as a legitimate ruse de guerre.

#### IV

Now it was December 7th, and word had been received that the attack had been postponed again, this time because the weather was not quite as bad as the High Command hoped. Besides secrecy, weather was the most important consideration for the offensive's success. If it was bad then Allied air attacks could not take place in great numbers, a definite plus for German troops who, ever since the Luftwaffe had lost air superiority, had been at the mercy of strafing and bombing attacks.

Skorzeny made good use of the postponements. In addition to the 150th Panzer Brigade's armored units equipped with American tanks and vehicles and disguised "Panthers," he had divided his commandos into three units to specifically confuse the enemy and gather information. The first group, known as "sprengkommandos" (demolition squads) was composed of units of five men each who would blow up bridges and fuel depots before the retreating Allies could use them. The second group, "Fuehrungskommandos" (signal detachments), was made up of units of three to four men who would cut Allied communications and get into the enemy communications net and give false and misleading commands.

But it was the third group which was most important. The "Aufklärungskommandos" (reconnaissance patrols), as they were known, were to uncover enemy movements on both sides of the Meuse River and simultaneously mislead the enemy by transmitting false orders, by changing traffic signs, by removing warning notices from mine fields, and by simulating mine field with white tape markers. It was this group which would, if possible, seize the bridges at Huy, Amay, and Andenne and hold them until relieved by the bogus 150th Panzer Brigade.

On December 13th word came to Skorzeny that the Attack was on for December 16th at 5:30 in the morning. Late that night, to insure secrecy, the entire 15th Panzer Brigade and the commandos units were transported by rail to Münstereifel, Germany, near the Belgium border, and hidden in the forests north of the town. Even other Germans who were to take part in the Offensive were cordoned out of the area in order to prevent leaks of Skorzeny's special troop disguise.

December 14th was spent in briefing his unit commanders. For many of the men who crunched through the foot-deep snow to Skorzeny's headquarters in a forester's shack, it was their first word of the unit's real mission. The earlier rumors were at last dispensed with as Skorzeny told them of Hitler's plan for the brigade to seize the bridges over the Meuse. Eagerly, the commanders returned to their units and informed their men of the plan. They listened enthralled, taken with the audacity of their role as Skorzeny had been almost three months before at Rastenburg. Many, however, would still believe during the attack that the seizure of the bridges was merely a forward to the kidnapping of Eisenhower and the Allied General Staff. Rumors died hard.

On December 15th, Skorzeny went around to each unit, telling them, "The important thing is to keep in contact at all times. Never get so far away from each other that you are cut off from communication. And don't fire on enemy troops unless you are forced to. One false move will give everything away. If you do have to fire, and there seems to be no way to avoid capture, then for God's sake take off your American uniforms. They'll shoot you as spies if you don't. Just remember, keep on advancing, no matter what. Use your own discretion when faced with obstacles of terrain." Skorzeny cursed Hitler's order for him to stay behind the lines, but there was nothing to be done. These men would have to be his eyes and ears during the fight.

Just after midnight Skorzeny walked through the snow-covered woods once again, flanked by Radl, Hardieck, and von Folkersam. Bundled in a khaki sweater and a heavy overcoat to ward off the cold, Skorzeny's dark shape loomed even larger than his normal bulk. The woods opened into a large clearing, surrounded by all sides by tall pine trees, and now filled with the 2700 men of Skorzeny's unit. Jutting out of the darkness here and there were the vague indefinable shapes of tanks and trucks. Small fires burned, illuminating redly the faces of small clusters of men gathered around them. Overhead, the sky was dark and overcast, effectively shutting off the scene from any Allied planes which might happen to fly over.

Skorzeny waited at the edge of the clearing as his commanders went from group to group, alerting them that their commanding officer was going to speak to them. Quietly, clusters of men gathered in front of the big Austrian, until finally all 2700 were assembled. With the help of von Folkersam, Skorzeny clambered atop the nearest tank. Unfolding a piece of paper and pulling a flashlight from his pocket, Skorzeny announced he had a message from



the commander of the offensive to the troops. The wind wafted his voice away. "I have a message for you; 'Soldiers of the Western Front! Your great hour has come! Today, strong attack armies go into action against the Anglo-Americans. I do not have to tell you anymore. You are all aware of the fact that everything is at stake! Bear in mind your holy responsibility to sacrifice everything and to perform the superhuman for our Fatherland and our Führer!'" "It is signed: von Rundstedt, Commander in Chief, West." Skorzeny paused, then went on, "All I can say to you is good luck! You have my full confidence that you will succeed if it is at all possible. You have been good soldiers on the training fields and now you will be good soldiers on the battlefield...Skorzeny stopped, searching for something else to say to the dark mass in front of him. He gave up. "Dismissed!" Chattering, excitedly, the men returned to the campfires.

Skorzeny jumped down from the tank. Then, with Radl, von Folkersam, and Hardieck once more at his side, he turned and walked into the woods back towards his headquarters shack. There, restlessly, he would await the dawn of December 16.

## V

As the night of December 15th passed into the morning of the sixteenth, a heavy fog crept over the positions occupied by Skorzeny's force. Hour by hour, the mist grew thicker, until by quarter after five it was difficult for the commando leader to see more than a few feet in any direction. Behind him, stretching off into the dimness, were the trucks, jeeps, and tanks of

his bogus battalions, quietly waiting in the positions they had assumed an hour earlier. In front loomed the vague shapes of the tanks of Lt. Colonel Jocheim Peiper's elite Panzer Kampfgruppe (Attack Force). As the commando leader climbed back into his jeep's right seat, he could feel the tension of waiting for the attack to begin.

Further down the road, other German soldiers of the column were also playing the waiting game. Men of the 1st SS Panzer Division whiled away the time by exchanging smalltalk. What a great victory for the Fatherland this would be. Hadn't the great old sage, von Rundstedt, said so himself in his Order of the Day they had listened to earlier? Finally, one of the men looked at his watch. Almost five thirty...time to go. He pulled himself up onto his tank as others followed suit down the long, snakelike line of Panzers, then turned and faced the men standing in the turret of the next tank. Waving, he yelled over the noise of diesel engines turning over, "Good-bye, Lieutenant, see you in America!" The lieutenant laughed nervously.

At 5:30 precisely the pre-dawn darkness was split by the fire and smoke of German artillery laying a huge barrage into the still sleeping American positions. All along an eighty-five mile front mortars wheezed, 88s screamed, and rockets hissed their way off launching pads hidden in the woods. Snow tumbled from fir trees as the air around them was buffeted by concussion waves. The ground trembled. Slowly, like an awakening dragon, the German columns began to move.

At the very rear of the line, Skorzeny raised a huge hand which only the nearest of his troops could make out through themist. Then he brought it down until it pointed directly ahead. The Battle of the Bulge had begun.

## VI

All through the morning the advance went well as the column passed through the sleepy villages of Tondorf, Blankenheim, and Schmidheim. By the time the sun finally rose at 8:30, the attacking force, with Skorzeny still at its tail end, was on the outskirts of the Belgian village of Losheimergraben, key to the Losheim Gap which opened into the Hohe Venn, or highland region, of Belgium. Once through the gap, Skorzeny's unit would break away from the main column and begin its tasks of confusion and impersonation. If all went well, the commandos would infiltrate down three key roads and seize the bridges over the Meuse River and hold them in readiness for the Sixth Panzer Army's tanks, which would cross the river and continue the advance towards Antwerp.

But as the minutes and hours ticked by and the clock advanced from 8:30 to 9, then from 9 to 10, and finally to noon, and still the column was outside Losheimergaben, Skorzeny knew that something was dreadfully wrong. What he could not see up ahead in the village were troops of the American 99th Division stubbornly resisting the German advance. The 99th, made up of green troops went to the quiet Ardennes area for a gentle introduction to combat, was heroically throwing back wave after wave of snow-suited attackers. Only a massive tank assault could break the defense before the light began to fade around 4 o'clock. But the High Command refused to commit its most valuable units so early in the game. Skorzeny, who had vowed during the training phase of "Grief" that he would not attempt his dangerous ruse unless the German advance had made considerable headway by the first day, was growing more and more angry as the column continued to be stalled on the outer reaches of the village.

By 7:30, the German attackers had finally driven the gallant 99th Division back. But now there was a new problem: a vital bridge north of the village had been blown up by the retreating Americans and German engineers hurriedly sent to repair it had found themselves lacking vital parts. Through some oversight of logistics, one of their trucks containing the ~~needed~~ elements had been assigned a place far back in the column, and now it was stuck there, like Skorzeny's unit, unable to move in the bottleneck of traffic which had developed. The column remained stalled.

After two more hours of waiting, Skorzeny furiously pulled his units off the road and into some nearby woods. What could he do now? Each minute that passed carried with it the chance that his mission might be able to succeed. Unless the advance could be resumed by that night, he had no realistic alternative but to cancel the employment of his forces.

Then, at 10 o'clock, he received word that the High Command had finally consented to launch a full-scale armored attack, to begin at midnight, bypassing the bridge and cutting through dense forests instead. There was still hope for Skorzeny's mission.

The big, scar-faced commando, heavily bundled against the biting cold, called together his commanders. He thought, he told the expectant group with a smile, that they would give it a try. Twenty minutes later 9 jeep-loads of disguised commandos were bouncing along back roads through the thick Belgian forests, with orders from their commanders to cause as much trouble as possible for the Americans, especially along the roads leading out of Trois Ponts, Vielsalm, and Roche a Frone to the Meuse River crossings at Amay, Huy, and Andenne. The 150 Panzer Brigade was sent along with Peiper's tanks for the breakout attack. Skorzeny had unleashed a whirlwind.

## VII

In the early morning hours of December 17, a regiment of the 84th U.S. Infantry Division tiredly marched into a crossroads near the Ourthe River. The men, who had been jarred out of their sleep the morning before by the German artillery barrage, and who had had no rest since, were being sent farther up to the front in hopes of blocking the German advance. They were unshaven and carried their M-1's at the ready, for German units were reported nearby.

One of their officers looked at the forks in the road confusedly. Which way now? As he fumbled in his map case for a chart, a young MP lieutenant approached him from his station at the intersection of the roads. "Can I help you, captain?" The lieutenant, too, looked harried in the dim morning light. A light blue scarf was tucked into his green field jacket, which bore the patch of the U.S. 5th Armored Division. The captain was grateful of his presence. "Yeah, lieutenant, how the hell do you got to Erezee on this road?" The lieutenant smiled, "Must be a lot action down that way. We've been sending people down there all morning. Just take a left here on this road. You should get there with no trouble. Watch out, though, 'cause I hear the Krauts planted mines just outside the town." The captain nodded his thanks, "Yeah, them Krauts are tricky bastards. Never can tell what they're gonna do." Then he turned to his men, who were sprawled on the edge of the road in the snow, and yelled, "Okay, get off your asses. We go down this road here. Let's move it!" As the men groaned to their feet, he turned back to the MP, "Thanks again, Lieutenant. See you around." Slowly the group trundled down the road. As it disappeared over a crest, the captain turned around and waved to the lieutenant, who smiled and waved back.



After the last of the men had disappeared over the hill, the lieutenant turned to several of his comrades who had gathered around him. Laughing, he said to the assembled group, "I hope the captain doesn't mind a slight detour." The men laughed with him. Then a man in the uniform of a sergeant turned to him, "Well, Herr Leutnant, what should we do now? Stay here or try someplace else?" The lieutenant smiled, "I think we'll stay here for a while. This is getting to be a lot of fun." Then the lieutenant walked over to a radio set in the back of his jeep to inform Col. Skorzeny what they had just done.

Thirty miles away, in the famed resort village of Spa, an officer on the staff of General Courtney Hodges, commander of the U.S. First Army, was talking by telephone to the headquarters of General Omar Bradley in Luxembourg City. Over a bad connection. He was trying to explain to one of Bradley's staff officers that the German attack was making great gains in the First Army's sector. The staff officer kept insisting that Bradley was on his way to Versailles for a meeting with General Eisenhower, so no action could be taken on the report immediately. Suddenly, the line went dead. Hodges' man tried to re-establish a connection. No luck. Frustrated, he slammed the phone down. Five miles away, two of Skorzeny's commandos, working in the guise of signal corps repairmen, had just finished cutting the main telephone wire between the two command posts.

Down the road from Spa, just outside the sleepy community of Stavelot, Belgium, two American soldiers crept over to an adjoining foxhole and started an argument over something foolish. While one of the soldiers yelled insults at the foxhole's occupants, the other slowly edged his way behind them.

Then, grabbing one of their own Browning Automatic Rifles, the soldier shot both the men in the foxhole. As he bent over to check the bodies, a light blue scarf dangled out of his field jacket. Some of Skorzeny's men, at least, were playing rough on this freezing December morning.

But it was at Liege, a major Meuse River crossing and one of Skorzeny's scouting areas, that the most important scene of the morning was taking place. A jeep full of American officers stopped at a crossroads and inquired the way to headquarters. The MP on duty was suspicious of the driver's poor English and his obvious German accent. Quickly the jeep was surrounded by heavily armed soldiers, and within minutes its occupants found themselves being subjected to the "shame technique" as practiced by Lt. Fredericks Wallach, a Dachau escapee, former German judge, and now an American intelligence officer. How dare they wear any uniform but that of the Fatherland, screamed Wallach. Soon, the unit's leader, a stubble-faced young lieutenant, was telling in detail of the 150th Panzer Brigade and the commandos under Skorzeny. He told Wallach all about the plan to seize the Meuse River Bridges by impersonating Americans. Astonished, Wallach sent the man and his tight-lipped comrades to the headquarters of the 1st Army for further interrogation.

In the 1st Army's intelligence quarters, the young lieutenant said that he had told all he knew to Wallach, but the commanding officer wasn't convinced. "Okay, we'll give you to the Commissar." Confronted with a giant of a man in Russian uniform who hurled questions and threats at him in an outlandish accent (being an American from Wisconsin), the lieutenant quickly broke down. Like many others, he was convinced that the seizure of the bridges over the Meuse was just a prelude to bigger things, especially the rumored mission objective which had been allowed to flourish at Freidenthal.

He hoarsely confessed, "We're after Eisenhower, too. Skorzeny and a party will impersonate American officers taking captured German generals to your Supreme Headquarters at Versailles for questioning. They will drive in American cars. Once inside, they will turn their weapons on your staff and Eisenhower will be kidnapped or killed by Skorzeny himself." The "Russian's" eyes got bigger with every word.

Now the fat was in the fire.

#### VIII

The commander of the bogus Americans was driving toward a German headquarters unit just below Losheimergraben, at Manderfeld, as his young lieutenant was confessing to the interrogator. Every foot of the way embroiled him deeper in a huge traffic jam. If possible, conditions were worse than the day before. Irritated, Skorzeny watched as an uninterrupted line of vehicles advanced slowly, yard by yard, down the clogged road. Finally he gave up in disgust and pulled his jeep out of the column and began driving on the edge of the road back in the direction he had come, only to find that going back was more difficult than going forward. A huge trailer carrying parts for a V-1 rocket had overturned, completely blocking the road and extending nearly into the forest on both sides. There was no room even to squeeze a jeep by.

The commando slowed his vehicle to a stop and jumped out. Treading through the snow he walked over to the trailer. "It's hopeless," he was told by the trailer's driver. "It just weighs too much to move." Skorzeny

surveyed the scene. Dozens of trucks were being blocked by the huge barrier. Unless it was pushed off the road, the entire column would be blocked for hours until heavy machinery could be brought in. He walked up and down the line of stalled vehicles, "Get all your men over to that thing." In fifteen minutes, with the help of hundreds of willing hands, the trailer had been pushed off the road.

Skorzeny climbed back into his jeep. By nightfall, after negotiating a number of pock-marked side roads for hours, he had arrived at Manderfeld. The quiet, snow-covered village bore more than a passing resemblance to a Christmas card as it lay peacefully under a hazy, overcast moon. The big Austrian drove through its cobbled streets to an inn near the center of the hamlet. Inside he found the commanders of the five divisions which made up the Sixth Panzer Army, and the Army's commander himself, Sepp Dietrich.

Dietrich was pounding on a table and laying down the law to the commanders. The attack which had begun at midnight the night before had slowed to a snail's pace. Angrily, he demanded that the 12th Panzer Division, which was stalled in front of the villages of Rocherath and Krinkelt, break through the American lines the next day "at all costs." "Why is it", he demanded, "that Peiper's Kampfgruppe can push all the way past Ligneuville and you can't even advance ten miles?" To the older tank commanders present, Peiper's quick advance with his own tanks and those of Skorzeny's 150 Panzer Brigade was a source of great embarrassment. Even in Russia, the thirty year old tank commander had made his superiors look like fools by racing across the steppes with his fanatic men.

Dietrich's order for the 12th Division to take the two villages was met by a hail of objections and arguments. Bitter threats and excuses were exchanged. Skorzeny, who had been aware since early morning that the attack was not going well, sat quietly as the generals ranted and raved at each other. Finally he raised his voice above the din and began to talk. "We cannot even dream of reaching the Meuse by tomorrow of the next day, and since my Operation Grief stands no chance without a full-scale breakthrough, I think the original plan should be dropped. Let my three battle groups be used for some standard operation." The commando had agonized over the situation all day, but as he had listened to the general's quarrel with each other for the past few minutes he had been finally convinced that he was right to request an end to his delicate task.

Dietrich grumbled a bit, but finally gave in. Skorzeny, relieved, spent the night in the village, but left early in the morning for his temporary headquarters in Schmidtheim. There he would recall the units he had sent through the lines.

## IX

By the morning of December 18th the word was out: Germans dressed in American uniforms were everywhere; no one was to be trusted, not even general officers. All across the Ardennes men were engaged in a huge game of cat-and-mouse.

Near Chaudfontaine, Belgium, two newspapermen, Lewis Gannett of the New York Herald Tribune and Lou Azreal of the Baltimore News-Post were



stopped by a nervous MP. "What state do you come from?" the jeep driver was asked. "Maryland," came the answer.

"What's the capital?"

"Baltimore."

"Okay," the MP nodded. "Go on."

"Hey," protested Azreal, "that's not right. It's--" But the jeep was already through the intersection.

Near Liege, an American general was stopped and forced to sing the first few bars of "Mairzy Doats" to prove his authenticity. Closer to the front, at Salmchateau, two fresh young lieutenants on a tour of the front were arrested and thrown into a nearby stockade for being "too damn polite." They had complemented a Spam dinner and so the rough veterans were sure they were Germans.

But it was in Paris that the greatest confusion reigned. Eisenhower's Intelligence Chief of Staff, a colonel named Gordon Sheen, had received reports of the Skorzeny plot to kidnap the Supreme Commander from 1st Army Intelligence. Immediately he drew a protective cordon around his chief. The General, used to freedom of movement, had been driven around Europe in the past months by a single orderly officer. Now, he was forced to move from his countryside headquarters at St. Germain (formerly the residence of von Rundstedt) and into the tightly guarded staff headquarters at Versailles. Everywhere he went he was accompanied by a platoon of MPs carrying machine guns. His aide, Navy Captain Harry Butcher, confided to his diary the substance of the rumors which were sweeping through Paris. "The men were described (by Sheen) as completely ruthless and prepared to sacrifice their lives to carry out their mission. All personnel speak fluent English...

Some units might have with them in their vehicle a German officer in uniform and, if questioned, would tell a false story that they were taking an important German prisoner to higher headquarters in the rear. They carry capsules of acid to be thrown in the faces of MPs or others to facilitate escape...Already about 150 parachutists have landed in the U.S. First Army's area.\*" Intelligence officers began referring to Skorzeny in their reports as "The Trojan Horse". Soon, correspondents covering Allied headquarters picked up the name for their news dispatches.

In the French capital there was something approaching mass panic. Posters were printed of Skorzeny and tacked up everywhere. The Cafe de la Paix, where "Trojan Horse" Skorzeny would supposedly assemble with his men, was placed under constant observation. The French police reported the landing of parachutists near Supreme headquarters, some of them dressed as nuns and priests. But, as Chief of Allied Intelligence Sir Kenneth Strong told one of his men, "paratroops always seem to disguise themselves as nuns and priests." Nevertheless, Strong advised Eisenhower to remain in his headquarters for a few more days "just as a safety factor." The future president was greatly annoyed. He called the reports "astonishing" and labeled the protective measures which surrounded him and cramped his freedom "useless and futile."

\* \_\_\_\_\_  
Note: German paratroopers under the command of Lt. Col. Baron August von der Heydte dropped over Baraque-Michel, just north of Malmedy, on the evening of December 16th. But high winds scattered the 1000 man force widely, which led (when combined with reports of Skorzeny's force) to exaggerated rumors of saboteurs and kidnappers. Some 700 of von der Heydte's men were blown off course.

## X

Hundreds of miles away from his supposed quarry, Otto Skorzeny, totally oblivious to his new nickname and the measures being taken against him in Paris, was turning over command of his 150th Panzer Brigade to the First Armored Corps SS, with a request that it be assigned an infantry role suitable to its size.

The next day, December 19, Skorzeny was told that the entire northern flank of the German advance was in danger of crumbling as the Americans began to hit back. The area around the important crossroads of Malmedy was especially in need of shoring up. Skorzeny immediately put in a call for his troops who were with Peiper at Ligneuville to reassemble near Schonberg by the morning of the next day. The commando also sent out some reconnaissance units, dressed in American uniforms, to scout out the Malmedy area. They returned with information that the town was lightly held. Late that night, most of the men he had sent out late on the 16th also returned. Of the 44 he had dispatched through American lines, 36 came back unharmed with their vehicles. Only two units had been captured.

On the morning of December 20th, Skorzeny traveled from his headquarters at Schmidtheim to the assembling area at Schonberg. There he was met by nearly all of the 2000 men of the 150th Panzer Brigade who had been with Peiper's Kampfgruppe.\* Hardieck, he was told, had been killed on the first day of

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NOTE: The 150th Panzer Brigade had also managed to confuse the Americans a bit before being called back by Skorzeny. But the magnitude of its deception was nowhere near as great as that of the commandos. I can find only two references to the Brigade in all of the hundreds of intelligence reports compiled by the U.S. Third Army, which took the brunt of the December German offensive. In their entirety, they are: "20 Dec.: Stoumont strongly held by enemy. Enemy reporting using captured American Tanks. 21 Dec.: Armed column composed of German and American vehicles observed VIC (Malmedy-Ligneuville)".

Peiper's assault, and von Folkersam had been wounded, so Skorzeny decided to ignore Hitler's order for him not to enter the fighting himself, and assumed command for the Malmedy assault. Counting the men of his headquarters section who had been retained behind the lines, he had an effective force of nearly the entire 2700 men with which he had entered the offensive.

Since the unit had been originally designed for rapid mobility, it had no field artillery of any size, so Skorzeny decided to attack Malmedy simultaneously from two sides at dawn on December 21, keeping one of his in reserve. "Our objective," he told his men, "will be the chain of hills north of the city. We will dig in there after capturing the town itself, thereby being able to repulse all possible enemy counterattacks."

The attack began on schedule at 5:30 the next morning. But since the time Skorzeny's scouts had returned with the information that the town was lightly held, three battalions of seasoned American troops had moved in. As the commando's right attack group moved north along the Ligneuville road towards Malmedy, it was met by the 1st Battalion of the 120th U.S. Infantry Division. The Americans poured fire viciously into the unsuspecting force, but it was left to artillery using the new POZIT fuze (which exploded above the ground) to drive Skorzeny's first attack force back.

Three hours later, under the cover of a thick fog drifting up from the nearby Ambleve River, Skorzeny's second force attacked from the left. It was met by the 3rd Battalion of the 120th and Company B of the U.S. 99th Infantry Battalion. It took only minutes for their combined mortar, machine gun, and artillery fire to dispel the assault. But Skorzeny's men were

tough, and within a half hour they launched another attack on Company B's machine gun emplacements on a hill overlooking the village. Several times the German infantry reached the foot of the hill overlooking the village. Several times the German infantry reached the foot of the hill but could get no farther. Finally, Skorzeny pulled his decimated troops back. The attack had failed.

## XI

Throughout the rest of the Ardennes on December 21st, the situation for the other German units committed to the offensive was also becoming worse and worse. The beleaguered city of Bastogne was firmly holding out against German siege as members of the elite U.S. 101st Airborne Division resisted attack after attack by tanks, infantry, and artillery of the Fifth Panzer Army. Fresh Allied troops were pouring into Belgium and Luxembourg from replacement centers in France and England. The "von Rundstedt offensive", as American newspapers were calling it, was grinding to a halt.

But the Skorzeny "Trojan Horse" scare in both Paris and at the front was still going strong. General Bruce Clark of the 7th Armored Division was arrested while inspecting a front-line unit. "I'm General Bruce Clarke," he kept saying. "Like hell," countered his MP captor. "You're one of Skorzeny's men. We were told to watch out for a Kraut posing as a one-star general." Clarke argued vehemently, but the MP ignored his protests and locked him in a building. Only a Kraut, the MP reasoned, would have said the Chicago Cubs were in the American League.



Elsewhere on the front, American officers were being arrested for wearing riding boots or carrying captured German pistols. Six British officers, unfamiliar with the American Constitution, were thrown into jail an hour before they were scheduled to brief Field Marshal Montgomery on the situation in the Ardennes.

All through the eighty-five mile attack zone the fear of impersonation ran wild. But it was a fear which no longer had any basis in fact. Although it would continue for weeks, by December 21st there wasn't a truly bogus American anywhere in the Ardennes outside a jail cell.

## XII

The remains of the 150th Panzer Brigade, led by Skorzeny, retreated to nearby Ligneuville. Of the 2700 men who had attacked Malmedy, 450 had been either killed, wounded, or reported missing. All of their armor had been knocked out. Their ammunition supply was less than six rounds per man. As a fighting unit, Skorzeny's men were through.

As the big commando walked towards the Hotel du Moulin on the outskirts of the village, a shell suddenly exploded nearby. When the smoke had cleared, Innkeeper Peter Rupp saw Skorzeny staggering, hand over eye. Blood seeped through his fingers and ran down his arm. Waving away a soldier who ran up to help him, the giant wobbled unsteadily into the hotel.

Within minutes, a doctor had arrived. Skorzeny was seriously wounded over his right eye. As he slipped into unconsciousness, he could hear the doctor ordering his removal to a field hospital. As his men watched unbe-

lievingly, their legendary commander was placed in an ambulance and driven away.

A week later the commando was grudgingly pronounced fit for duty by a doctor whom he had badgered continuously for a return to his unit. Skorzeny hurried back to Ligneuville, just in time to see his battered brigade relieved by an infantry division fresh from Finland. It was December 28, 1944. Three days later the unit retired to Kohlwald, Germany. Operation Grief, more successful than Skorzeny could possibly know, was over.

HITLER'S TROJAN HORSE:

THE SECRET MISSIONS OF OTTO SKORZENY

Part Six:

"The End: From Schwedt to Salzburg"

The Battle of the Ardennes ended officially on January 23, 1945. After 37 days of fighting, it was obvious that the Germans had suffered a resounding defeat in their last ditch effort to split the Allied armies. German losses were put by the High Command at 81,834 killed, wounded, and missing and 36,000 captured. Losses in material were incalculable.

For Otto Skorzeny, the offensive had ended on December 31, when he was flown to Hitler's headquarters for the Ardennes campaign in Ziegenberg, Germany, to make a full report to the Führer on what he had seen of the battle. On entering the dictator's offices, Hitler had been shocked at the bandage over his commando's right eye and had sent Skorzeny immediately to one of his own physicians, a Dr. Stumpfecker.

Around 4 o'clock in the afternoon, Skorzeny reported back to Hitler, his eye freshly bandaged. To his astonishment, Hitler was enthusiastic about the course of the battle. For almost half an hour he rambled on, talking of future victories.

"We are not going to start a great offensive in the southeast. The Americans have been forced to withdraw fifty per cent of their forces to the Ardennes. And now the line around Alsace, 100 miles to the south, is extraordinarily thin. There we will strike in a few days with Operation 'Nordwind.' Its certain success will automatically bring about the collapse of the threat to the left of the main offensive in the Ardennes...which will then be resumed with a fresh prospect of success."

Skorzeny was greatly cheered by Hitler's confidence, but as he left the room a few minutes later, he couldn't help but wonder if the Führer's high spirits weren't due to the drugs he was being administered by the quack

doctor, Morell. Earlier, while having his eye treated in the headquarters' infirmary, one of the doctors present, Rudolf Brandt, had told him Morell's injections and stomach pills were extremely dangerous. "I recently analyzed one of those stomach pills," he said. "It contained arsenic. I warned the Führer, but he wouldn't listen."

## II

Skorzeny spent the next two weeks trying to create some sort of order out of the chaos of Freidenthal. Most of his best leaders had been squandered in the Ardennes, and with Germany quickly sliding towards Armageddon it was difficult, if not impossible, to resupply his remaining men. Daily requests poured in for his services. All had to be denied because there was nothing to send.

On January 18, the bulk of the remainder of his highly trained troops under the command of von Folkersam were sent to help in the defense of Prussia against the advancing Russians. Three days later they radioed, "Position untenable." Skorzeny was able to send them a few truckloads of ammunition before losing contact. He never saw von Folkersam again.

On January 30, Skorzeny received an order from Himmler, who had been named the commander of "Army Group Vistula," dispatching him with the remainder of his ground forces to Schwedt, a port city on the Oder River. There, Himmler believed, Skorzeny could establish a firm barrier for Berlin against the Russians. When he arrived with his pitifully small force, the big commando found he could draw on the services of only 150 officer-cadets and 500 or so ageing and crippled members of the Regional Defense Force.



In the next month, his small force grew tremendously, aided by volunteers of almost every shape and size: stevedores from nearby docks, a Home Guard battalion from nearby Königsberg, a battalion of the elite Hermann Goering Division sent down by the Reichsmarshal himself, a cavalry unit from God knows where, and two battalions sent by Himmler. Soon, Skorzeny had nearly 15,000 men. Berlin promoted him to Major General in view of his enlarged responsibility.\* Two years earlier he had been a lieutenant fighting against the Russians.

In mid-February, the Russians attacked at Königsberg Home Guard unit to the struggle and led a unit of his own into the fighting. The battle raged for several hours in bitter house-to-house combat, but there was little Skorzeny could do. The city fell to overwhelmingly superior Russian forces.

Wearily stumbling back to his quarters in Schwedt late that night, Skorzeny found waiting for him the commander of the Königsberg unit. Evidently the man didn't know that Skorzeny had been in the beleaguered city all day, for he immediately burst out, "Sir, I've been waiting for hours to tell you that the situation in Königsberg is hopeless." It was the most obvious case of desertion in the face of the enemy Skorzeny had ever seen. He had the man arrested, court-martialed, and hanged in the public square of Schwedt.

On February 28, Skorzeny was recalled to Berlin by Hitler, who didn't want to sacrifice his favorite in a routine battle. The big commando was sent back to Freidenthal, where he spent the next week at a desk. The only men left to him were a few of his Navy swimmers and divers, stationed on the Danube, who had been too specialized for infantry roles and hence had been spared the agony of Schwedt.

\* NOTE: Typically, Skorzeny never got around to filling out the required forms. He remained a lieutenant colonel until the war's end.

## III

On March 7th, the U.S. 9th Armored Division captured Remagen, Germany, and with it the Ludendorff bridge, the only intact span across the Rhine the Allies had been able to find. For Hitler, it was the most distressing blow he had received since the July 20th bomb plot the previous year. His great fear was that the bridge had perhaps been intentionally left open to the advancing Americans by disloyal officers. What if other bridges should fall to the Reich's enemies in the same manner? He shuddered at the thought. But for the present, who would be the best man to insure that the Ludendorff Bridge would not be in use long enough for the Allies to benefit? He turned to Jodl within minutes of asking himself the question. "Send for Skorzeny."

By the time the jolking Austrian arrived at the Führer headquarters, on the evening of the 7th, Hitler was asleep. It was Jodl who had to tell him of his task.

The Führer wants you to destroy the Remagen bridge with your frogmen," the Chief of OKW Operations informed him. "The enemy must not be allowed to use it much longer or he will establish a bridgehead we cannot turn back. We have tried everything we know to destroy it, but nothing seems to work. Artillery, bombs...nothing."

Skorzeny did not exactly jump at the opportunity to serve his Fatherland in this particular assignment. "The temperature of the Rhine is almost zero (on the centigrade scale)," he told Jodl, "and since the Americans are already extending the bridgehead upstream, I can see very little prospect of

success." The little general pressed him, "This is a specific order from the Führer." Skorzeny finally gave in, but with one condition: he would let his divers and swimmers survey the bridge and then leave it up to them whether or not to attempt the mission. Jodl agree.

Skrozeny journeyed the next day to the base of his Navy frogmen on the Danube. He transmitted Hitler's order, but stressed that the final decision was up to them. Three nights later, on the evening of March 11th, from the cover of some conveniently located bushes near the river's edge, the commandos surveyed the bridge. American searchlights played back and forth across the pilings of the massive structure, while guards patrolled the span endlessly. The frogmen gazed for a long time at the scene, then one of them crawled to the water's edge to test the river's temperature. After a whispered conversation among themselves, their leader, a young ensign, turned to Skorzeny, "Give us a week and some of the new 'plasit' explosive."

#### IV

The week passed quickly as the frogmen and Skorzeny charted a plan: the men would dress in dark rubber "wetsuits" and would smear a flat black chemical compound on their faces and hands to prevent any reflection from their bodies as the searchlights swept across the river. Their weapons would be empty five gallon gasoline cans, each strapped with four packages of "plasit." The men would float down the river until they reached the bridge supports, where they would attach the explosives and set each with a five minute fuse to allow time for the river's current to sweep them away to safety.

Then, on March 17, the day the plan was to go into effect, the bridge collapsed as American engineers were trying to weld a huge crack in its superstructure caused by an earlier German bombing attack. Twenty-eight Americans were killed outright or drowned as the mass tumbled into the Rhine. But a second bridge was constructed in two days by engineers using pontoons and steel mesh. The frogmen decided not to waste their planning. On the night of March 19, they slipped into the river's icy waters. Within twenty minutes all had been spotted by Americans operating the top-secret CDL (Canal Defense Lights - a powerful light beam whose source was undetectable). Two men were drowned as bullets ripped through the water. The rest were hauled ashore by their American captors.

Skorzeny, waiting upriver for news of his men's success or failure, left disgustedly for Berlin when he heard that the harebrained scheme had ended in disaster for the daring men

## V

In Berlin, Skorzeny reported to Hitler's bunker in the Reiche Chancellery, there to be met by a kind-faced young woman with brownish-blond hair. "I have heard so much of you. You must come to tea soon and tell us about some of the things you have done." The young woman was Eva Braun. Then Hitler appeared, shaking and bent with age. His hands trembled and his eyes were watery and bloodshot. He dragged himself over to the big Austrian. "Skorzeny, I have not yet thanked you for your stand on the Oder. Day after day it was the one bright spot in my reports. I have awarded you the Oak

Leaves to the Knight's Cross, and I mean to hand them to you myself. Then you can give me a full account. For the future, I have other work for you..." Then he shuffled off. Skorzeny would never see him again.

The next day Skorzeny visited an old friend, Hans Ulrich Rudel, in a Berlin hospital. Rudel was a Luftwaffe flyer who had gained considerable reputation as a test pilot and ace. His air adventures while flying over two thousand combat missions on the Russian Front had made him the sort of matinee idol Skorzeny had become after the Mussolini rescue. A few weeks earlier, Rudel had lost a leg in the crash of a Focke-Wulf 190. Now he wanted to fly again. "My mechanics are making a steel band to go around my stump so I can reach the pedals," he told Skorzeny excitedly. Skorzeny was dubious. "This is nonsense, Rudel. Think it over. First of all, your wound isn't healed - it's completely open. You can't go to the front like that. You'll get gangrene."

But Rudel was insistent. "I have to get out!" A few days later Skorzeny called the hospital to see how his friend was doing. "Oh," the doctor answered, "that madman escaped!" Within weeks he was in the air again, but too late to help his country back from the edge of doom.

## VI

From Berlin, Skorzeny was sent to Vienna, the home of his youth, on an inspection tour for the Führer. As he approached the outskirts of the city on April 9, 1945, he was appalled to see column after column of German troops retreating raggedly. His anger increased as he noticed that wounded soldiers



were walking while their healthy comrades rode on trucks overflowing with looted furniture. He attempted to stop a cart loaded with furniture, unscathed soldiers, and a girl. When it kept moving, he reached up and grabbed its driver, a sergeant, by the collar and slapped him several times across the face. "Now throw out all that furniture and make room for wounded people! If the girl wants to come she has to walk." Then he took the sergeant's gun and handed it to the nearest wounded soldier. "Load up only wounded," he ordered.

As he prepared to enter the city across the Floridsdorfer Bridge, he was even more disgusted by the behavior of three officers he came across. The men were dumping clothing and food out of a cart and loading it back up with valuable paintings. Nearby, an old woman, obviously the owner of the cart, was weeping uncontrollably. She grabbed at one of the officers as he hurled a small vase to the ground to make room for more of his loot. The officer roughly kicked her away.

Skorzeny, incensed, drew his pistol and shot the man in the shoulder. He went down as his two companions whirled on the big commando, only to find the pistol covering them both. Within minutes, enlisting the aid of nearby soldiers, Skorzeny had hanged all three men from a pillar of the bridge.

By the time Skorzeny entered his home town it was dark. He went immediately to the local army headquarters, where he learned to his relief that two of his units which had been quartered in Vienna had escaped earlier. Then he set out in search of his family.

First, he went to his mother's home. It was totally destroyed, but a neighbor crawled out of some nearby wreckage to tell him that she was safe

and had left the capital a few days before. His brother's house was also destroyed, but this time neighbors couldn't tell the commando where he had gone.

He drove slowly through the deserted streets of Vienna. Except for occasional gunfire, there was little sound. A cry here, the crackling of flames there. He found the company where he had worked before the war. Inside, there was no light, gas, or telephone, but his old partner and his secretary made him tea over an oil stove as workmen crowded around to shake his hand. "We hope you get away, sir. And think of us." As he drove away from the factory and towards his own home, he passed two elderly policemen. "What's the situation here?" he inquired. "Colonel," replied one of the old men with a grin, "we are the defense line of Vienna." Even in these worst of times the Viennese still retained their famous sense of humor.

He found his home intact and ghostly in the moonlight. Idly, he wandered through its rooms. The rugs his wife had loved, the silver they had bought together, the family pictures... He turned and left without disturbing a thing, leaving it all for the Russians when they moved in.

Skorzeny drove back to the inner city, mindless of the Russian tanks which rumbled through nearby streets. When he reached the German military fortress in the center of the capital, he went immediately to the offices of General Rudolf von Bünau, the army commander for Vienna. He told Bünau that he had seen no German soldiers but plenty of Russians. "When I get out," he told the general, "I will report to the Führer that Vienna is lost." Bünau nodded, then asked if the commando would like to see Baldur von Schirach, former head of the Hitler Youth and now the defense commissioner for the city;

he was down the hall in his offices.

Skorzeny found von Schirach huddled over some maps in a luxurious room lighted by dozens of candles set in an ornate chandelier. "Ah, Skorzeny! You see I have only candles to work by."

"I suppose you know," the commando ventured, "that the Russians can walk in whenever they like."

Von Schirach glared up at him. "That's impossible!"

Skorzeny told him to drive around and see for himself. Von Schirach still wouldn't give into reality.

"My two SS divisions will attack from the north; I shall close my pincers from the west. Thus we shall liberate Vienna as Prince Stahremberg liberated her from the Turks in 1683."

Skorzeny tried once again. "I advise you to escape." But von Schirach was adamant in his self-delusion.

"No! I will never leave this post and I will die in this spot. But nothing is lost. The reinforcements are coming. We'll hold the Russians."

"You're a dreamer," countered Skorzeny. "I will report to the Führer that Vienna is lost." He left the defense commissioner playing with his maps, moving his ghost armies back and forth.

It was dawn as Skorzeny drove rapidly back across the Floridsdorfer Bridge under heavy sniper fire on April 11. He turned in his seat for one last look at his home town, his lovely Vienna. It was in flames. Inside, after all the years of hardship and hope and struggle, the big Austrian's heart finally gave way. His world had collapsed, and with it his interests in the outcome of the war.

It was a disconsolate Skorzeny who wired to Hitler later in the day his impressions of the capital he had just left:

ON THE STREETS LEADING FROM VIENNA TO WEST I FOUND MORE OR LESS CHAOTIC SCENES AND I PROPOSE FORCEFUL ACTION BE TAKEN THERE. VIENNA PRACTICALLY DEFENSELESS AND WILL FALL IN RUSSIAN HANDS THIS MORNING.

## VII

Skorzeny traveled north towards Hitler's supposed "Alpine Fortress" near Radstadt, where he had agreed to meet his aide Radl following his inspection tour of Vienna. He found his second in command thinner than he had last seen him, but his old humor and cynicism were still intact.

"Look what came for you a little while ago from our besieged capital of Berlin! Something you'll really be needing in the days ahead." Radl tossed Skorzeny a black velvet box. Inside were the Oak Leaves to his Knight's Cross. A messenger had braved strafing aircraft, roaming Russians, and hostile deserters to deliver them to the commando on Hitler's personal order. Skorzeny shook his head wearily.

The two men, accompanied by a few of the many German soldiers in the area, took up residence in a nearby gamekeeper's house. There, for almost three weeks, they lived a life of quiet solitude in the mountains, untouched by the final death throws of the Third Reich. Skorzeny would take long walks during the day. At night, he and Radl would settle down to a peaceful game of cards. Now they were just waiting for the end.

A visiting Luftwaffe officer offered Skorzeny a ride to Spain aboard

his aircraft, but the commando declined. Next came a surprising visit from Dr. Walther Funk, the Nazi Minister of Economics. He explained that he had fled Berlin with the State Treasure. Would Skorzeny be willing to guard it? "No," came the curt answer.

Then on April 30, news came that Hitler was dead. Now it was truly over. Six days later Germany surrendered and Admiral Dönitz ordered all German soldiers to lay down their arms. Skorzeny decided to wait for the Americans to come a little closer to his hideaway before giving himself up. Why end his idyl prematurely?

Several more days passed without incident. Then he was told to his surprise by local residents that American troops were combing the hills for him. For the first time Skorzeny began to suspect the renown with which the Allies regarded him. He learned that, for months, his picture had been on wanted posters all through France, billed as "the Trojan Horse" or "the most dangerous man in Europe," as a result of the "plot to kill Eisenhower." He knew he could delay no longer.

On May 10th, Skorzeny sent a message to the commander of the American troops in the area, requesting that a car come to his cottage on May 15th to take him to Salzburg, where he would surrender formally. There was no answer; perhaps the note was never delivered. In any case, Skorzeny sent another request three days later. This time a car loaded with military police and Intelligence officers came immediately to his dwelling. He and Radl were packed into the rear seat and driven to the huge P.O.W. cage at Salzburg. Once inside the camp's offices, the hulking commando marched stiffly to the central desk, while guards blocked the entrance door to prevent his escape.



Idly, the officer sitting at the desk glanced upwards. Then his eyes opened in amazement as he saw the famous scarred face and towering frame looming over him. Skorzeny removed his pistol from its holster and placed it carefully on the desk. Then he saluted sharply. In a quiet voice he announced, "SS Lt. Col. Otto Skorzeny gives himself up." The officer stared for several moments in astonishment at his new charge. Then, with his eyes still glued to Skorzeny's face, he shakily lifted a telephone receiver. Within minutes the room was full of officers and correspondents. Flash bulbs exploded madly.

The Trojan Horse had surrendered.

## Epilogue

Otto Skorzeny was kept in the Salzburg stockade for less than three days. He was transferred after intense questioning to Wiesbaden Prison on May 18th, and from there to Nuremburg on September 10th. For the next ten months he was shuffled back and forth from maximum security cell to maximum security cell while the Allies prepared "war crimes" charges against him.

Finally, on July 17, 1947, he was sent to Dachau to be tried for violations of the Geneva Convention: wearing the uniform of the enemy for purposes of infiltration, assassination, and sabotage. The Allies were extremely embarrassed that, after all that time, they could find nothing else on him.

The charges were knocked away one by one. "Yes," said Skorzeny, he had ordered his men to wear American uniforms...but he had also cautioned them to remove them before the fighting started. Assassination? No such thing was ever planned; it was all a rumor. Sabotage? There was a tricky one, but Skorzeny was saved on that point when a famous British commando, Forrest Yeo-Thomas, gaily admitted to the judges that his own men had done the very same thing. "Absolutely!" he smilingly proclaimed when questioned on the subject.

Skorzeny was acquitted by a unanimous vote of the nine-man tribunal.

But there was more to come. Denmark and Czechoslovakia wanted him for war crimes. Then word came that it was all a mistake; no extradition requests had been made. Then, post-war Germany, trying to recover from the shame of Hitler, decided it wanted to "de-Nazify" the big Austrian. Skorzeny wrote to Yeo-Thomas asking for advice. "Escape!" came the reply. In July, 1949, he did just that.

He fled to Spain with a Nansen passport, that catch-all document for stateless persons. There, he established a construction firm on the lines of

the one he had operated before the war. He worked hard and was successful. But the world news services wouldn't leave the rescuer of Mussolini, the kidnapper of Miklós Horthy, the "Trojan Horse" commander of Operation "Greif", alone. His picture appeared almost weekly in some news journal or paper, always involved with some sort of neo-Nazi plot to take over the world.

In 1952, he was finally declared de-Nazified "in absentia" by a West German court. Later that year he concluded the biggest post-war machinery deal between Spain and West Germany. He has grown prosperous with his business.

Today, at 62, he is nearing retirement age. He has been sick lately, paralyzed from the waist down because of a spinal operation for cancer. But he is learning to walk again, aided by old friends from Freidenthal. But still that image of lawlessness foisted upon him by the press during the war remains. A recent news clipping says he is involved in gun-running to Ireland.

The legend still lingers.

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NOTES (CONT'D)Chapter XII

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Chapter VI

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Chapter VII

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Chapter I

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Part V: "Operation 'Greif'" (Cont'd on next page)

NOTES (CONT'D)

## Part V: "Operation 'Greif'"

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Chapter I

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NOTES (CONT'D)Chapter II

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Maps and photos

German and American field maps, daily situation charts, intelligence photos, all from the collection of the George C. Marshall Research Library.