

The Last Photographs of Hitler



BY WILLIAM VANDIVERT

I ENTERED Berlin in July, 1945, with the first Allied correspondents and a few days later turned up a rotund German civilian who had been an employee of Heinrich Hoffman. Anxious for American cigarettes, he offered to lead me to the files which contained the last 10 years of Hoffman's work as official photographer to Hitler and the Nazi regime.

Hoffman and his staff had enjoyed a monopoly on photographs of Hitler, so I hastened to accept this offer. My guide took me to an underground bunker not far from Hitler's own. In a room about 10 by 16 feet, lined with cabinets, we found 65,000 plates and about 7,000 rolls of Leica film.

I spent most of my time working over a file marked "Zerissen bei Der Führer"—torn by the Führer—knowing that Hitler's censorship of his own legend would make good article material. When I'd completed my journalistic mission, I noticed a small white capsule on which was scribbled "Letzte Aufnahmen von Hitler"—last pictures

of Hitler—and the date of February. My guide confirmed that these hastily and badly developed pictures had been taken in February of 1945, and were indeed the last known to have been made of Der Führer.

The coming of VJ-Day took away much of their news value at the time, so I filed the films away. Recently I came across the souvenir roll and had some prints made. What they showed I thought would be of more than mere souvenir interest to PAGEANT readers today.

Here we see Hitler on a dismal day in February, 1945, inspecting a unit of the Volksturm, the people's army on whom would fall the final desperate defense of Berlin. As he took a left-handed salute from the one-armed Volksturm commandant, and moved slowly down the line of cripples and young boys, he may have seen the handwriting on the wall.

We remember that at this time Patton had broken the Siegfried line, the Russian winter offensive was rolling through Prussia and a thousand American bombers nightly were turning Berlin into a flaming stage for the Nazi Götterdämmerung.

But Hitler went back into his 18-room underground burrow, just 50 yards from where these pictures were taken by one of Hoffman's men. The war went on for several bloody weeks until April 29, when Hitler and Eva Braun, according to all the best evidence, committed suicide in the Führerbunker.

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