

YANK

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AND in a very different setting, in the PW section of a Third Army post in Bavaria, YANK Correspondent Cpl. Howard Katzander, got a very different slant on what might lie behind Hitler's death from a source a little closer to Berchtesgaden:

THE colonel was out of uniform—regrettably so for an officer of his rank in the Third Army area—but he carried it off well. He was average in height, slim and blond-haired. He carried a crooked cane, and was dressed in green cotton trousers, and a pepper-and-salt sport jacket zippered up the front. He wore grey suede gloves and, as he talked he sat cross-legged, occasionally slapping at one trim brown oxford, composed and nonchalant as if he were back on his father's East Prussia estates in the heart of Germany's Junkerland.

The story he was telling was the story of why the war did not end last July. It was the story of the attempt to assassinate Hitler and he knew all about it. Because this was Lt. Col. Wilhelm Kuebart, a member of the Wehrmacht General Staff, and one of the original plotters.

Kuebart was a Junker gentleman of the Prussian militarist class with a long military tradition behind him. His wife was the daughter of a Junker general. His uncles were Reichswehr officers and before them his grandfather and great-grandfathers as far back as his memory went. Only his father had departed from the tradition to embrace a profession as an architect.

In the fall of 1932 Wilhelm Kuebart entered the Reichswehr as an officer-candidate. He was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the fall of 1934.

From then on his rise was rapid and in the best Junker tradition. He participated in the Polish campaign in the late summer of 1939 as a first lieutenant and in the summer of 1940 he became a captain and was transferred to the staff of the 18th Panzer Division. In the early spring of 1941 his talents and family background received due recognition and he was sent to the *Kriegsakademie*—the General Staff School—after which he joined Von Leeb's staff in the Central Army Group on the Russian front.

It was there that Kuebart was inoculated with the anti-Hitler virus in its most violent form. Almost the entire staff of this army group was anti-Hitler.

This was not unusual. The Junker officer class was probably the most exclusive club in the world. Its members regarded the military as the only career fit for a gentleman and it regarded the Wehrmacht as its own private sphere.

Kuebart had taken a pretty dim view of the Nazi regime from the beginning, the way he tells it, and had never joined the National Socialist Democratic Workers Party. Kuebart and his fellow officers felt that their ranks had degenerated under Hitler and they were particularly resentful of Himmler's attempt to spy on the officers and impose SS control over them. Hitler's spectacular failures as general and Supreme Commander of the Armies led to open revolt. The disaster at Stalingrad was the last straw.

From that time on the most popular subject of conversation among officers of the old school was the question of how to get rid of Hitler and Himmler. Kuebart had been sponsored for a place on the General Staff by Col. Hansen, Chief of the Wehrmacht Intelligence Service, and Hansen was the brains behind the plot against Hitler's life. The *Burgemeister* of Leipzig, Boerdler, was to take political control. Hansen went to Zeitzler, Chief of the General Staff, and persuaded him that immediate action was necessary.

The date for the assassination was set for July 13. The weekly conference between Hitler and his generals was to be held as usual on that day. But, at the last minute, there were two hitches. Himmler was not going to be present and Hitler decided to hold the conference in a flimsy wooden barracks.

The bomb that had been prepared to wipe out Hitler and Himmler was designed for use in Hitler's underground headquarters where heavy concrete walls and the earth itself would confine the force of the blast to the small room.

When the bomb was exploded in the frame building above ground—it had been brought to the conference in a brief case—its force was dissipated. Hitler was injured, but not seriously. The attempt had failed.

It could not be proven definitely that Kuebart had plotted against the Supreme Commander, but it was felt that he had betrayed his trust as an officer of the *Wehrmacht*. Accordingly, a crushing blow was dealt him. He was expelled from the *Wehrmacht* as "*undwirdigkeit*," unworthy of the honor of wearing the uniform. He was forbidden to reenter the army even as a buck private. He was kept under constant Gestapo surveillance, apparently in the hope that his movements would betray others who had taken part in the plot.

Kuebart says that 120 high German officers were hanged as a result of the plot, and 700 others are waiting execution.

When American troops overran the area where Kuebart had been living with his wife and two children since his expulsion from the army, he calmly walked into the CP of B Battery, 551st Antiaircraft Artillery Battalion and told his story. He expected to speak his piece and go home to his wife and kiddies. He had papers to show that he had been expelled from the German Army. He assured his interrogators that his group had been prepared to sue for peace immediately if their plot had succeeded.

But he did not go home to the wife and kiddies. Somehow or other, the Third Army did not feel that his expulsion from the army relieved him of responsibility for the part he had played up to that time. He is now in a PW cage and knows no more than anyone else of what actually happened to Hitler this time.

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