

The Death of Nazism? Investigating Hitler's Remains and Survival Rumours in Post-War Germany

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“Becoming really dead”, argues Thomas Laqueur, “takes time”.¹ It has been more than 70 years since Adolf Hitler’s suicide in his Berlin bunker, yet the passage of time has done little to diminish public fascination with the Nazi leader, nor stem speculation surrounding the circumstances of his demise. Indeed, some people have doubted whether Hitler died in Berlin at all; survival myths remain popular fodder for tabloid newspaper articles, sensationalist television documentaries, and best-selling books.² Fundamentally, the endurance of such legends is rooted in the chaos of the immediate post-war era and the Allies’ failure to positively identify any human remains as those of the former *Führer*. In the absence of a body, what counts as irrefutable proof of death?

In 1945, the western Allies’ answer was to establish a clear timeline of the events leading up to the suicide, piecing together witness testimonies from Hitler’s staff and poring over key documents, such as his last will and testament. The first history on this topic, produced by

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Hugh Trevor-Roper in 1947, reflected this approach, using information collected during the author's service with British Military Intelligence.³ Potential forensic evidence, gathered by the Soviets, was released only gradually. It was not until 1968 that Lev Bezymenski was able to publish his account based upon the autopsy reports on the alleged remains of Hitler and Eva Braun.⁴ Since the end of the Cold War, additional material from the former Soviet archives has revived scholarly interest in the case, spurring reassessments of the available medical evidence by the likes of Ada Petrova, Peter Watson, and Daniela Marchetti.⁵ Yet, while there are now detailed—if varying—accounts of the *mode* of Hitler's demise, there has been little attempt to explain the origins and persistence of survival myths, or to locate Hitler's end within the broader context of a National Socialist fixation with the dead.

This chapter, therefore, sets out to demonstrate that the death of Adolf Hitler was both a biological and social process. The Nazi regime had been constructed around a cult of personality and the leader's death became synonymous with Germany's total defeat in the Second World War, a significant rupture marking the end of National Socialism itself. In reality, of course, the regime limped on for an additional eight days without Hitler, and supposed sightings of the former leader kept his memory very much alive in the public imagination. Hitler's suicide, then, was hardly a "zero hour" for the nation, but an event that serves to demonstrate the complexity of post-conflict commemorative culture.⁶ Drawing upon British Foreign Office and Military Intelligence records, this chapter traces the Allies' efforts to sort the fact from fiction. At the same time, it also reveals how post-war power struggles to control the narrative of Hitler's death contributed to the subsequent survival mythology, with Nazis and Allies both deliberately casting doubt on the timing and cause of death to further their own interests.

To understand initial German reactions to the loss of Hitler, we have to situate them within a longer history of Nazi rituals and martyrdom legends.⁷ During the Third Reich, the Nazi regime routinely peddled the notion that fallen comrades were not truly dead, but continued to fight for Germany as part of an immortal, spiritual army. This was important, ideological glue for manufacturing the *Volksgemeinschaft* (People's Community) and preparing the population for the necessary challenges ahead. The anniversary of the 1923 Munich Putsch, in which 16 Nazis had been killed, became one of the holiest days in the Nazi calendar. Speaking at the commemorations in 1942, for example, Hitler declared:

Truly these sixteen who fell have celebrated a resurrection unique in world history... From their sacrifice came Germany's unity, the victory of a movement, of an idea and the devotion of the entire people... All the subsequent blood sacrifices were inspired by the sacrifice of these first men. Therefore we raise them out of the darkness of forgetfulness and make them the centre of attention of the German people forever. *For us they are not dead.* This temple is no crypt but an eternal watch. Here they stand for Germany, on guard for our people. Here they lie as true martyrs of our movement.⁸

This existing emphasis on the eternal spirit of Nazism constituted a ready-made framework for casting doubt on Hitler's own mortality. In addition, the German public had become somewhat accustomed to Hitler being able to extricate himself from perilous situations. Hitler had survived numerous assassination attempts during his time in power—most notably, Georg Elser's bombing of the Bürgerbräukeller in Munich in November 1939 and the Operation Valkyrie attempt in the Wolf's Lair in July 1944. Following the latter event, Hitler gave a radio speech in which he declared that his survival was proof that his work was blessed by Divine Providence.⁹ Given this background, it is understandable that his eventual, ignoble end in a Berlin bunker may have been viewed with disbelief.

One of the key challenges facing the Allies in 1945, then, was to dismantle some of these prevailing mythologies. A thorough denazification programme was intended to cleanse Germany of every last vestige of National Socialism, including the removal of Nazi symbols from the landscape. The elaborate memorials that had been constructed in honour of the "old fighters" killed in Munich were removed and the iron sarcophagi that had housed their mortal remains were recycled for use in repairing regional railway lines. "Ordinary" cemeteries were also affected by the political transition away from fascism: gravestones were purged of swastikas and other Nazi imagery or, in some cases, destroyed altogether. The Allies' central aim was to prevent the formation of pilgrimage sites that could be used to sustain National Socialist ideology. Consequently, those who had died fighting for Nazism were now being subjected to a form of "social death", stripped of their previously exalted status with their past achievements now rendered taboo in public discourse.¹⁰ The fate of Hitler himself quickly became entangled with this denazification process. With his image banned after the war, and access

to the former Reich Chancellery and bunker controlled by the Allies, the German people had little outlet for mourning their fallen leader. This may have come as something as a culture shock after the sophisticated state funerals of the Third Reich. Unlike the posthumous history of other dictators, such as Stalin or Mussolini, there was no public memorial or display of Hitler's body. Consequently, John Borneman argues that the population endured "an enforced silence about the scene of death and the whereabouts of the corpse".¹¹ The extent of this "silence" can, of course, be called into question by the sheer number of rumours that emerged immediately over the timing, manner, or actuality, of Hitler's death.

It was at 10.30pm on Tuesday, 1 May 1945, following three solemn drum rolls, that Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz took to the airwaves of North German radio to make a crucial announcement: "German men and women, soldiers of the armed forces: our Führer, Adolf Hitler, has fallen. In the deepest sorrow and respect, the German people bow".¹² Reflecting on the manner of Hitler's death, Dönitz added:

At an early date, he had recognised the frightful danger of Bolshevism and dedicated his existence to this struggle. At the end of his struggle, of his unswerving straight road of life, stands his hero's death in the capital of the German Reich. His life has been one single service for Germany.¹³

Further reports within the German press the following day elaborated on the glorious nature of the Führer's last stand—and applied a similar rhetoric of immortality to that previously assigned to those killed in the Munich Putsch. The *Hamburger Zeitung*, for example, insisted:

We know that he must have perished while fighting bitterly in the Reich Chancellery. We know that the enemy will be able to find a body in the ruins caused by countless artillery shells and countless flame throwers, and *that they may say that it is the Führer's body, but we will not believe it*...What is mortal of him has perished, has passed away but he has fulfilled his most beautiful oath [to give his life to his people]...He began by fighting for his people, and he ended that way. A life of battle.¹⁴

Similarly, a message broadcast to troops stationed in the Netherlands proclaimed: Adolf Hitler, *you are not dead*, you live on within us. The ideals which you gave us cannot be extinguished ... Beneath the ruins of a devastated Berlin, you remain the fountain of all Germans.¹⁵

In terms of the final pieces of Nazi propaganda, then, the cult of the Führer remained very much alive. His memory and, in particular, the seemingly dramatic nature of his demise—courageously resisting the Soviet advance into Berlin—served as a last-ditch appeal to the German people to keep on fighting. These descriptions of Hitler's final moments, though, were designed to obscure the truth. The consensus of scholarly opinion and witness testimony suggests that, on 30 April 1945, Hitler chose to kill himself rather than end up in the hands of the advancing Russians. In his last hours, he married his long-term companion, Eva Braun, dictated his will and political testament, and administered cyanide to his beloved Alsatian dog, Blondi, to determine the effectiveness of the poison.¹⁶ Having heard about the public desecration of Mussolini's corpse on 28 April, he made preparations to ensure that no similar humiliation would be extended to his remains. Petrol was ordered and his staff members were instructed to incinerate his body when the time came. Indeed, Hitler's own precautions would prompt much of the post-war debate and confusion about his fate.

Almost immediately, the veracity of Dönitz's account was called into doubt by the Allies, and even some high-ranking Nazis. The day after Dönitz's radio address, the Russian newspaper, *Pravda*, proclaimed the whole story to be a "fascist trick to cover Hitler's disappearance from the scene".¹⁷ Observers in Britain and the United States, while noting that a death fighting against the "Bolshevik hordes" would have been "quite in character" for Hitler, quickly moved to undermine what was left of the German war effort by issuing statements challenging Dönitz's account of Hitler meeting a "hero's death" in Berlin.¹⁸ To support their claims (and to try and avoid their comments being dismissed as enemy propaganda), the western Allies seized upon an account of Hitler's failing health promulgated by the head of the SS, Heinrich Himmler, more than a month earlier. According to notes of a conversation between Himmler and the Swedish diplomat Count Folke Bernadotte on 24 March 1945, Hitler was "finished". Himmler claimed that the Führer was suffering from a brain haemorrhage and would be dead in a couple of days, if he wasn't already—a sentiment that immediately cast doubt on the precise timing of Hitler's demise.¹⁹

For the Allies, disseminating Himmler's version of events could sow the seeds of discord among the remnants of the Nazi leadership and shatter any remaining illusions that the general population still harboured about their "courageous" leader, preventing the formation of

martyrdom myths. A Foreign Office memorandum noted that “there is every indication that German propaganda will play up the manner of Hitler’s death with a view to establishing the Hitler legend. We must do all in our power to play it down”.²⁰ Himmler’s account was privately regarded as a “good weapon” to encourage the Wehrmacht, now released from their oath of loyalty, to surrender and prompt the fall of more German cities. A public statement issued by General Eisenhower dismissed Dönitz’s statement as an effort “to drive a wedge between the British and Americans on one side and the Russians on the other”.²¹

For Himmler, meanwhile, the original assertion in March 1945 that Hitler was in no fit state to rule served to strengthen his own negotiating hand for surrender, enabling him to present himself as the provisional leader of the country. Himmler was conspicuously absent from the public discussion of Hitler’s death on 1 and 2 May, suggesting the continuance of a power struggle between himself and Dönitz. By advancing competing accounts of Hitler’s health, the pair cast doubts on the closeness of one another’s relationship with the Führer, and their right to rule in his stead.²² At the same time, with one eye undoubtedly on the future, even Dönitz was rather muted in his eulogy, dedicating just six sentences of his radio broadcast to dealing with Hitler’s death. Having been named as Hitler’s successor, Dönitz then used the remainder of his radio broadcast to try and rally popular support behind him. Observers within the British Foreign Office similarly noted an absence of “fanatical party statements” in remembrance of their leader. Given the dire military situation, this relatively restrained response from Hitler’s fellow Nazis may be seen as an attempt to dissociate themselves from the failing regime, and an effort to strengthen their own position with the advancing Allies. Different parties, then, were able to appropriate Hitler’s death to further their own political cause.

Publishing Himmler’s comments in early May 1945 sparked a long-standing fascination with Hitler’s medical history, including the lingering physical effects of the attempt on his life in July 1944, and the psychological strain of living in the Berlin bunker during the final phases of the war. In the immediate aftermath of the war, the Allies initiated a search for any surviving medical records, and interrogated anyone who had treated Hitler in the past, knowing that such evidence could play a vital role in identifying any human remains. How and where Hitler died consequently became the subject of great speculation: was it inside or outside of the Führer bunker? Was it the result of a stroke or nervous

collapse, cyanide capsule, lethal injection or gun? Could Hitler have taken cyanide and still have time to shoot himself in the temple? Had death occurred at Hitler's own hand, or was it the result of his doctor's intervention? Timing too, became a crucial issue. British military intelligence took great pains to reconstruct Hitler's movements in the final days and hours leading up to his death. But had death occurred even earlier than 30 April 1945? In June, the Allies received what they acknowledged to be a "very odd" communication from an Austrian builder to the effect that Hitler had actually been shot by an army general in March 1944, that the infamous July bomb plot later that year had been contrived by Nazi propagandists and that his corpse actually lay in a secret crypt below Obersalzberg, Hitler's mountain retreat in Berchtesgaden.²³ American investigators in Bavaria, however, could find no evidence to support this claim.

Had Hitler died at all? Amidst the Dönitz-Himmler debate in early May 1945, the *Daily Telegraph* published the testimony of Major Erwin Giesing, Hitler's personal physician, who refuted claims that the Nazi leader had been in ill health. In conclusion, the newspaper declared there was "some doubt" about the cause of Hitler's death, adding, "if he is dead".²⁴ By 15 May 1945, Winston Churchill had similarly admitted to the House of Commons that he was unable to confirm "beyond doubt" whether Hitler was dead.²⁵ The Chief of the US Secret Service, Brian Conrad, conceded that "the only decisive evidence ... would be the discovery and positive identification of the corpse". He added, "if such evidence is unavailable, all that remains are the detailed accounts of certain witnesses who either knew of his intentions or were eyewitnesses to his fate".²⁶

In terms of the former, the Allies soon appeared to have found what they were looking for. On 2 May—one day after Dönitz's radio address—Soviet forces occupied the former Führer bunker in Berlin and quickly discovered the remains of Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels, his wife Magda, and their six children. At the time, two Soviet officers, Lozovski and Litvinov, expressed some scepticism about the chances of finding Hitler's body too, believing that he had "gone to earth" along with Göring and Himmler.²⁷ On 5 May, however, the badly-burned corpses of a man and a woman were found in a bomb crater within the garden of the former Reich Chancellery, prompting speculation that they were that of Adolf Hitler and Eva Braun. Subsequent examination by Soviet forensic pathologists confirmed the presence of glass splinters in

their mouths, consistent with biting into a cyanide capsule.²⁸ The male corpse was “heavily charred” and missing part of its cranium, but estimated to be “somewhere between 50 and 60 years” old; Hitler turned 56 in 1945. The other key point of interest for investigators concerned the male corpse’s teeth, described as having “much bridgework, artificial teeth, crowns and filings”.²⁹ Hitler’s former dentist, Dr Hugo Blaschke had already managed to flee Berlin but, under Soviet interrogation, two of his former staff members, Käthe Heusemann and Fritz Echtmann, were able to describe and sketch Hitler’s distinctive dental work from memory. On 9 May, they were invited to examine the physical remains retrieved from the bomb crater and concluded that they did, indeed, belong to the Nazi leader. Accordingly, on 31 May, KGB officer Ivan Serov informed Stalin and Molotov that “there is no doubt that the supposed corpse of Hitler is really his”.³⁰

While the official Soviet records were not released at this time, news of the discovered corpses was relayed in the media.³¹ In June 1945, *The Times* also published a detailed account by Hermann Karnau, a former guard, who confirmed that he had seen the bodies of Hitler and Eva Braun lying in the grounds of the Reich Chancellery: “both bodies were on fire, but were clearly recognisable”.³² Yet this was not to be the end of the matter as the Soviets spent the rest of the summer of 1945 suddenly casting doubt on their own findings. On 10 June, Marshal Zhukov of the Red Army told a press conference: “The situation is very mysterious ... We have failed to discover a body confirmed as Hitler’s. I cannot say anything definite about Hitler’s fate”.³³

Rumours now spread that the charred remains previously seized upon by investigators had belonged to a body double and that Hitler had managed to flee the ravaged capital after all. On 5 July, a *Daily Telegraph* correspondent visiting the scene agreed that the previous narrative of suicide and cremation seemed doubtful:

The account of Hitler’s death in the shelter and the burning of the body, as told by the German policeman Kernau [sic] at 21st Army Group HQ recently, fits in perfectly with the evidence on view here. There are even five petrol cans, all marked with the SS sign...Corroboration is so overwhelming as to be almost suspicious.³⁴

Why did the Soviets refute the dental evidence? The consensus among historians, including Russian scholars Vinogradov, Pogonyi and Teptzov,

and the British academic Roger Moorhouse, is that this was a typical, cynical move by Stalin. In part, it reflected his own paranoia and mistrust of the forensic evidence being set before him; but it also became another way of exercising a degree of power over the other members of the war-time alliance. In July 1945, *The Times* repeated the claim that the jawbone found on the grounds of the Reich Chancellery had been positively identified as that of Adolf Hitler, but acknowledged that:

Whatever pronouncement is made, it is certain that many people in Germany, especially here in Berlin, will go on believing in the legend of his escape under cover of one of the doubles he is supposed to have employed. It seems strange that of all the people of authority round Hitler, none has been found to give an account of what happened, and the circumstantial evidence accumulated from lesser fry could well be an attempt to cover Hitler's trail.³⁵

The *Daily Herald* concurred, noting, “no one with whom I have talked in Berlin believes that Hitler is dead. They all think he ‘got away’”.³⁶

The search for firm proof of death thus continued, although it was hampered by missing witnesses and mutual suspicion between the Allies. A memorandum produced by the Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Force at the end of July 1945 bemoaned the fact that “it is impossible to give any authoritative account of Hitler’s last days since evidence is still accumulating. That which is already available is sometimes contradictory and incomplete and depends often on hearsay and conjecture. Much of the evidence, too, is in Russian hands”.³⁷ The Americans, having captured Dr Blaschke themselves, proceeded to interrogate him about Hitler’s dental history. Like Heusemann and Echtmann before him, Blaschke was able to recreate detailed descriptions and diagrams of the treatment he had performed on the Nazi leader—yet Allied investigators were hampered by the fact they had no post-mortem evidence to compare this to; Hitler’s alleged jawbone and teeth were now archived in Moscow and the Soviets showed no signs of being willing to share this evidence.

To circumvent the lack of medical proof, the British and the Americans launched an extensive and time-consuming hunt for as many potential bunker eyewitnesses as possible. By the end of the process, Hugh Trevor-Roper was able to piece together accounts from secretaries Elsa Krüger and Traudl Junge who independently reported that Hitler

had shot himself; Hitler Youth leader Artur Axmann who inspected the bodies and confirmed a bullet wound to Hitler's right temple; guard Erich Mansfeld who witnessed the removal of a body wrapped in a blanket; tailor Willi Otto Müller who saw five men carrying petrol on the evening of 30 April 1945; and the aforementioned Karnau who recognised the bodies as they were set on fire. The evidence, he noted,

is not complete, but it is positive, circumstantial, consistent and independent...It is considered quite impossible that the versions of the various eye-witnesses can represent a concerted cover story; they were all too busy planning their own safety to have been able or disposed to learn an elaborate charade which they could still maintain after five months of isolation from other and under detailed and persistent cross-examination.³⁸

Soviet investigators, meanwhile, spent the spring of 1946 re-visiting the purported scene of Hitler's death. Samples were taken from the blood-stained sofa in Hitler's living quarters while further examination of the bomb crater unearthed what was immediately considered to be the missing fragment of Hitler's skull, complete with apparent bullet hole. Once again, though, there was a refusal to make any definitive public statement on Hitler's death and, in the absence of any forensic proof of death, the Allies continued to be inundated with stories that Hitler and Eva Braun had escaped the bunker altogether. Letters were received from all over Germany, describing supposed sightings of the former leader, or promising to divulge important "facts" about his fate. Some accounts had them fleeing by plane to Denmark and thence to Argentina by submarine.³⁹ Others had them relocating to Munich, Hanover, or Hamburg, living under assumed names and the effects of plastic surgery. In September 1945, for example, the Hamburg story gained particular momentum through a series of sensational articles in the international media. Dr Karl Maron, Deputy Bürgermeister in East Berlin, inflamed matters by stating that he was "firmly convinced" that Hitler was still alive, and sea patrols began a search for the mahogany yacht believed to have conveyed the couple to safety. The British, who occupied this part of the country, were compelled to investigate these allegations, if only to be able to discredit them. A handwritten memo in the Foreign Office archives reveals the private sense that it was all "sheer poppycock". One commentator noted succinctly that the so-called "plastic operation" that had "changed Hitler's appearance" was probably carried out with a service revolver in the Führer bunker.⁴⁰

The fact that such speculation existed owes much to the secrecy and contradictory messages disseminated by the Soviets about the forensic evidence in the summer of 1945. However, it can also be traced back to the sheer chaos in Germany during the final days of the Second World War. With the lines of communication broken, no clear political leadership, and the increasing threat posed by the advancing Red Army, everything had been in disarray, enabling rumours to spread like wild-fire. Even Dönitz's official announcement of Hitler's death was experienced differently in different parts of the country. In the north, where Dönitz was trying to establish his provisional capital, the radio station had prefaced the broadcast with three warnings that "grave and important" news was about to be revealed, together with the playing of sombre music. It then held a three-minute silence in honour of the deceased. Consequently, the broadcast was rendered an event on North German radio. Listeners in the south, however, missed all of this. As the country teetered on the edge of collapse, many radio stations and other parts of the Nazi propaganda machinery had already fallen into Allied hands, reducing the Party's ability to disseminate a clear, uniform message. It was an hour and a half later that southern stations finally issued the news that Hitler was dead. Their audiences had not been prepared for this announcement as well as their northern counterparts; indeed, relatively light and cheerful music had been played up until midnight.⁴¹ The timing of Hitler's death thus became fluid in the public imagination. The lack of a "proper" send-off on some radio stations may also have made it easier for people to doubt the accuracy of the reports.

What purpose did the survival stories serve, though? In part, documenting supposed sightings of Hitler may have simply been a form of attention-seeking, or even a deliberate attempt to stir up confusion between the Allies. It might also be argued that the rumour-mongers, having been denied any opportunity to mourn their leader, view his body, visit his final resting place or disseminate his image, were rebelling against the Allied "containment" of Hitler's death. Supposed sightings of Hitler and Braun enabled people to question the veracity of Allied pronouncements and imagine their own conclusion to the regime, regaining some element of control over the narrative. Alternatively, the very fact that people were volunteering "information" on Hitler's whereabouts to the authorities may be indicative of a desire to wreak revenge on the man held responsible for their current state of affairs, a hope that Hitler might yet be discovered and brought to justice for the damage he had inflicted

upon the country. However, as Allied investigations focused on following potential leads to Hitler, rather than the characters of those making the sightings or spreading the rumours, we do not have the sufficient data to fully understand the motivations of these individuals.

That survival stories continue to emerge in the twenty-first century owes much to an enduring popular fascination with the Third Reich and the knowledge that other Nazis, such as Adolf Eichmann, did indeed manage to escape to far-flung locations after the war. More significant, though, is the fact that there remains some reasonable doubt about the thoroughness of the Soviet autopsies and the identification of the few body parts that have been retained since the exhumation of the Reich Chancellery gardens. In 2000, the skull fragment that had been retrieved in 1946 was “rediscovered” in the Russian archives and placed on public display in Moscow, generating a whole new wave of interest in the circumstances surrounding Hitler’s death. In 2009, however, DNA analysis conducted by researchers at the University of Connecticut revealed that the fragment actually belonged to a woman under the age of 40, a result that immediately stirred up new conspiracy theories that rejected the narrative of Hitler’s suicide in the bunker.⁴²

The controversy surrounding the death of Adolf Hitler, then, shows no sign of abating. For the Allies operating immediately after the war, the aim was simple: find conclusive proof of the Nazi leader’s death so that Nazism itself could be rendered truly dead. The western Allies, in particular, were all too aware that a lack of evidence could foster martyrdom myths, or fuel belief in Hitler’s continued existence, thereby encouraging people to cling to the tenets of his ideology and fight on. A definitive end to the matter was considered not just desirable, but also achievable. An American cartoon published on 2 May 1945, the day after Dönitz’s official announcement of the Führer’s death, depicted a swastika draped body being removed from the ravaged Berlin landscape and asked whether this constituted “the end of the road”.⁴³ Similar, if fleeting, optimism was expressed amid the initial confirmation that the charred remains discovered by the Soviets matched the available dental evidence for Hitler and, in 1956, there was renewed hope for closure when the district court in Berchtesgaden formally declared Hitler deceased and placed the death certificate on public display.⁴⁴ Hitler’s “death” has thus occurred at multiple junctures. It is the failure, however, to unite legal, forensic and anecdotal proof of his demise that has enabled alternative versions of Hitler’s fate to endure and keep him very much alive in the public imagination for all this time.

NOTES

1. Thomas W. Laqueur, "The Deep Time of the Dead", *Social Research*, 78 (2011), p. 802.
2. For the most recent of these see Simon Dunstan and Gerrard Williams, *Grey Wolf: The Escape of Adolf Hitler* (New York, 2011); Paul Nelson dir., *Conspiracy* (2015); "Hola Hitler! Ex CIA Agent Claims Nazi Leader Faked His Death and Flew to Tenerife before Escaping to Argentina on a U-Boat", *Daily Mail*, 8 January 2016. The most recent claim—that Hitler fled to Tenerife—was printed across other British tabloids, including *The Sun*, *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Express*. The popular German press also has a tendency to relay such stories, but they usually stress their origins in the foreign media. See, for example, "Hitler Konnte Fliehen—Sollen FBI-Akten Beweisen", *Die Welt*, 7 October 2015; "Hat Hitler den Krieg Überlebt?", *Bild*, 7 October 2015.
3. Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The Last Days of Hitler* (London, 1947).
4. Lev Bezymenski, *The Death of Adolf Hitler: Unknown Documents from Soviet Archives* (London, 1968).
5. Ada Petrova and Peter Watson, *The Death of Hitler: The Final Words from Russia's Secret Archives* (London, 1995); Daniela Marchetti et al., "The Death of Adolf Hitler—Forensic Aspects", *Journal of Forensic Sciences*, 50 (2005), pp. 1147–1153. Most recently, scholarly attention has shifted onto the role of Allied intelligence gathering. See Sarah K. Douglas, "The Search for Hitler: Hugh Trevor-Roper, Humphrey Searle and the Last Days of Adolf Hitler", *Journal of Military History*, 78:1 (2014), pp. 159–210; Luke Daly-Groves, "The Death of Adolf Hitler: British Intelligence, Soviet Accusations and Rumours of Survival", Unpublished dissertation, University of Central Lancashire (2015).
6. The notion of 1945 as a "Zero Hour" or *Stunde Null* for Germany has enjoyed some currency over the years, giving the post-war German states a fresh foundation on which to construct their identities and distance themselves from the recent, Nazi past. See, for example, Konrad Jarausch, "1945 and the Continuities of German History: Reflections on Memory, Historiography, and Politics". In Geoffrey J. Giles ed., *Stunde Null: The End and the Beginning Fifty Years Ago* (Washington, D.C., 1997), pp. 9–24.
7. There is a growing literature on Nazi death cults. See, for example, Jay Baird, *To Die for Germany: Heroes in the Nazi Pantheon* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1990); Sabine Behrenbeck, *Der Kult um die Toten Helden: Nationalsozialistische Mythen, Riten und Symbole 1923 bis 1945* (Cologne, 2011); Jesús Casquete, "Martyr Construction and the Politics of Death in National Socialism", *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 10:3, (2009), pp. 265–283; Peter Lambert, "Heroisation

- and Demonisation in the Third Reich: The Consensus-Building Value of a Nazi Pantheon of Heroes”, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 8:3–4 (2007), pp. 523–546; Daniel Siemens, *The Making of a Nazi Hero: The Murder and Myth of Horst Wessel* (London, 2013).
8. “Zum 9 November 1942: Gedenktag für die Gefallenen der Bewegung”, *Die Neue Gemeinschaft*, 8 September 1942. Author’s emphasis.
 9. Cited in Jeremy Noakes ed., *Nazism: A Documentary Reader, 1933–1945. Vol. 4: The German Home Front in World War II* (Exeter, 1998), pp. 624–626.
 10. The term “social death” is frequently invoked within Holocaust studies to describe how Nazi policies of discrimination and segregation steadily rendered the German public indifferent to the treatment of the Jews; ostracism from mainstream society during the 1930s was the first step towards physical extermination during the Second World War. It is the contention of this chapter, though, that the term can offer valuable insights into the fate of Nazi perpetrators, a group hitherto overlooked within studies of post-war remembrance culture.
 11. John Borneman ed., *Death of the Father: An Anthropology of the End in Political Authority* (New York, 2004), p. 2.
 12. “Doenitz Announces Hitler’s Death”, 1 May 1945. Jewish Virtual Library. Accessed at: <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Holocaust/hitlerdeath.html>. This statement was reproduced in the international media. See, for example, “Donitz [sic] as Head of State”, *The Times*, 2 May 1945.
 13. “Doenitz Announces Hitler’s Death”.
 14. “Abschied von Hitler”, *Hamburger Zeitung*, 2 May 1945.
 15. FO371/46748: Review of the Foreign Press, The National Archives, Kew (hereafter TNA). Author’s emphasis.
 16. Witness testimonies from bunker staff and several leading Nazis agree that Hitler had expressed a desire to commit suicide from 22 April 1945. See WO208/3781, TNA.
 17. FO371/46748: Roberts to Foreign Office, 2 May 1945, TNA.
 18. FO371/46748: Harrison memorandum, 2 May 1945, TNA.
 19. Meeting between Heinrich Himmler and Count Folke Bernadotte reported in FO371/46748: Washington to AMSSO, 2 May 1945, TNA.
 20. FO371/46748: Harrison memorandum, 2 May 1945, TNA.
 21. FO371/46748: Yarrow telegram, 4 May 1945, TNA. Eisenhower’s statement was reprinted in the press. See, for example, “Hitler Met No Hero’s Death, States ‘Ike’; Was Dying of Brain Illness over Week Ago”, *Ottawa Citizen*, 2 May 1945; “Eisenhower’s Exposure of New ‘Fuehrer’”, *Daily Telegraph*, 3 May 1945.
 22. By mid-May 1945, Himmler’s own fate had become the subject of some discussion. Responding to a question in the House of Commons,

- Winston Churchill declared, "I expect he will turn up somewhere in this world or the next and will be dealt with by the appropriate local authorities. The latter would be more convenient to His Majesty's Government". See FO371/46748: PMQs, TNA.
23. FO371/46748: AFHQ to German Department, 7 June 1945, TNA.
 24. "Hitler's Doctor Denies Führer was Ill", *Daily Telegraph*, 7 May 1945.
 25. FO371/46748: PMQ by Major Anstruther-Gray, 15 May 1945, TNA.
 26. Cited in V. Vinogradov et al., *Hitler's Death: Russia's Last Great Secret from the Files of the KGB* (London, 2005), p. 262.
 27. FO371/46748: Roberts to Foreign Office, 6 May 1945, TNA.
 28. The Soviet autopsy report was first published in 1968 in Bezymenski, *The Death of Adolf Hitler*, pp. 44–51. Excerpts were later reproduced in Marchetti et al., "The Death of Adolf Hitler", pp. 1147–1148.
 29. Marchetti et al., "The Death of Adolf Hitler", p. 1148.
 30. Cited in Vinogradov et al., *Hitler's Death*, p. 108.
 31. See, for example, "Reported Finding of Hitler's Body", *The Times*, 7 June 1945.
 32. "Hitler's Last Hours", *The Times*, 21 June 1945.
 33. Cited in Petrova and Watson, *The Death of Hitler*, p. 44.
 34. "Body Russians Found Was Not Hitler's", *Daily Telegraph*, 5 July 1945. See also "The Body Outside Hitler's Shelter Was Not His", *News Chronicle*, 5 July 1945.
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 36. "Hitler Still Alive Says Moscow", *Daily Herald*, 5 July 1945.
 37. FO371/46749: Memorandum by the Supreme Allied Expeditionary Force, 30 July 1945, TNA.
 38. WO208/3781: "The Death of Hitler" (undated), TNA.
 39. The Denmark story gained particular traction towards the end of 1947 when Peter Baumgart, a former Luftwaffe pilot, was named as the person who had piloted the Hitlers to Denmark via Magdeburg.
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 44. "The Death Certificate of Adolf Hitler", 25 October 1956, Associated Press Archive. Accessed at, <http://www.aparchive.com/metadata/youtube/1bc3d33e28bb42fe8ad521c890c644d3>.

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