

### **The Discovery of and Reactions to Hitler's Last Words**

- Found in Robert Moeller- *The Nazi State and German Society*<sup>1</sup>  
Page 181, source 59- My Political Testament by Adolf Hitler, April 29<sup>th</sup>, 1945.
- Author- Adolf Hitler- born 20<sup>th</sup> April 1889 and died April 30<sup>th</sup>, 1945
- Originally found: Adolf Hitler "My Political Testament," doc. 3569-PS in Office of the United States Chief of Counsel for Prosecution of Axis Criminality, Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression (Washington D.C. US Government Printing Office, 1946), 6:260-61, 263.

This source is a transcript of Hitler's Last Will and Testament in which he gives his final statement before committing suicide in his bunker in Berlin, in particular he praises the German people, and condemns the 'poisoner of all peoples, international Jewry.'<sup>2</sup> The original document was transcribed by Hitler's secretary, Traudl Junge, dictated by Adolf Hitler on the 29<sup>th</sup> April 1945. The focus of this exploration is how the document was created and what its journey was from Hitler's bunker to getting into Allied hands. Further, the reactions to the document will be assessed, both from the Allied points of view and the German people as well. What is necessarily interesting about research of this document is the story of how quickly it turned up in Allied hands.

Three copies of the document were made, which were carried by Heinz Lorenz, Wilhelm Zander and Willi Johanmeier. As part of US Intelligence report, dispatched to Washington on January 8<sup>th</sup> 1946, the first of the three documents, carried by Lorenz, was captured once Lorenz was 'already under arrest for possessing false identity papers.'<sup>3</sup> As stated in the report, the first question was that of authenticity, and once this had been confirmed, the next was why Lorenz had the document, and where the other copies were. By mid-December 1945, all three copies of Hitler's Last Will and Testament had been recovered.

With the documents in Allied hands, they were sent to Harry Truman of the United States and Clement Atlee of Great Britain to be examined, with another copy being sent to prosecutors preparing for the Nuremberg Trials.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Moeller, *The Nazi State and German Society*, (Bedford/St. Martins, 2010), p. 181

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 183

<sup>3</sup>US Intelligence Report regarding the capture of the document, accessed at [https://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online\\_documents/holocaust/Hitler\\_Will\\_General\\_Intelligence.pdf](https://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents/holocaust/Hitler_Will_General_Intelligence.pdf) - the original report was dispatched on January 8<sup>th</sup>, 1946 to Washington.

First, the Last Will and Testament's role in the Trials will be assessed. The Allies did not necessarily use the document as evidence to prosecute, as the author was already dead, and it gave no further evidence to implicate other leading Nazi party members. However, what is interesting is how it was used by some defendants. As part of Von Schirach's defense, he stated that '... But that murder was not committed by Hoess; Hoess was merely the executioner. The murder was ordered by Adolf Hitler, as is obvious from his last will and testament. The will is genuine. I have held the photostat copy of that will in my hands.'<sup>4</sup> Von Schirach was the Nazi Party national youth leader and because of his role in the party was sentenced to 20 years in prison, but as a result of his testimony regarding Hitler's last will and testament, his crime was under Count Four instead of Count One, the most serious count, as he was able to move blame from himself and Hoess to Hitler.<sup>5</sup> In a similar way, the document was also quoted by Dr. Sauter as part of the Hostage Trial in an attempt to get judges to forget their biases and judge his defendants equally to others.<sup>6</sup> This demonstrates how even Nazis used the document as a way of putting blame on Hitler for his views, and not on themselves.

The reactions by the Allies regarding the documents differed greatly. British Foreign Secretary Ernst Bevin 'was in favor of restricting access to the originals and withholding official comment ... thereby consigning them to oblivion,' so as to not raise any more anti-German sentiment.<sup>7</sup> However, US President Truman did not share this opinion, and allowed the document to be released, leading to many articles regarding the document being published. The earliest was from *The People*, published on 30<sup>th</sup> December 1945. This outlines the story of how the documents were captured, and predates Bevin's concerns, showing the document had already been found and authenticated. This authentication is mirrored in a 31 December 1945 article in *The New York Times*, which claimed the 'authenticity is beyond question.'<sup>8</sup> *The Sunday Mirror* published the story on 1 January 1946, but unlike *The People*, the story differed from the US Intelligence Report, suggesting that it was partly fabricated, decreasing its credibility. *The New York Times* also published on 1 January that the British

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<sup>4</sup> Doc. 3569-PS referenced in Nuremberg Trials as part of testimony by Von Schirach on the 138<sup>th</sup> day 24<sup>th</sup> May 1946, accessed at <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/05-24-46.asp>.

<sup>5</sup> Von Schirach's Judgement, accessed at <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/judschir.asp>

<sup>6</sup> Doc. 3569-PS- referenced in the Nuremberg Trials as part of Transcript for NMT 7: Hostage Case accessed at <http://nuremberg.law.harvard.edu/transcripts/4-transcript-for-nmt-7-hostage-case?seq=10109&q=Hitler+testament>

<sup>7</sup> Astrid Eckert, *The Struggle for the Files: The Western Allies and the Return of German Archives after the Second World War*, (Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 46. Eckert's source is the BritEmb Washington, Aide Memoire, Ref. G4/-/46, Jan. 9<sup>th</sup> 1946, NA RG 59, CDF 1945-49, FW 840.414/1-1246

<sup>8</sup> *The New York Times*, published 31<sup>st</sup> December 1945

were satisfied by Hitler's death, and it was only after a 'long study of evidence' that the Americans shared the same view.<sup>9</sup> This article states that it was now beyond doubt that the documents were genuine and revealed the actual locations of the documents. Further, the *Chicago Tribune* also reported the story, giving a half page to the complete story of how the messengers were caught. What this newspaper adds is the reactions of the leading Nazi members in custody, to Hitler's claim of betrayal by Himmler and Goering, stating that it 'created furor... in the Nuremberg jail.'<sup>10</sup> This gives more of an insight into the reactions of the German Nazis awaiting trial, and further how the document caused outrage even as the Nuremberg Trials were underway.

The effect the documents had on Germans themselves are also seen, primarily by Junge herself, who wrote in her memoirs that she had expected: 'now at last I shall hear ... an explanation of what has happened, a confession, or perhaps a justification ... but my expectations are not fulfilled.'<sup>11</sup> This shows how disheartened Junge was at not hearing the truth from Hitler, and this is also corroborated by Hugh Trevor-Roper's account of it, that the document contained nothing but 'the old hollow claptrap, the negative appeal, the purposeless militarism, of the Revolution of Destruction; the protestations of innocence, and the recriminations of failure.'<sup>12</sup> This highlights how reaction to the document was that of dismay, and Hitler had provided nothing new that had not already been told.

After the use of one copy of the document at Nuremberg, it was moved to the United States, and can now be found at the National Archives in Maryland and in the Nuremberg Trials Archive, with another copy, originally given to the President, on display at the National Archives in Washington.<sup>13</sup> The location of the last copy is unknown, but the copy itself was given to General Vaughn, one of President Truman's closest aides and advisors.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *The New York Times*, published 1<sup>st</sup> January 1946

<sup>10</sup> *The Chicago Tribune*, published 1<sup>st</sup> January 1946.

<sup>11</sup> Traudl Junge, *Hitler's Last Secretary: A firsthand account of life with Hitler*, by, written in 1947 but not published until 2002 in German and 2003 in English, (Arcade Publishing, 2003), p. 187

<sup>12</sup> Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The Last Days of Hitler*, (First published in 1947, edition found published by Pan Macmillan, 2013), p. 156

<sup>13</sup> Eckert, p. 47

<sup>14</sup> Found in the Truman papers, accessed at, <https://www.trumanlibrary.org/oralhist/grahamw.htm>

### **Annotated Bibliography in Chronological Order**

- Screenshot from The People (British Newspaper) on the 30<sup>th</sup> December 1945.  
<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000729/19451230/003/0001>  
 This newspaper was mainly distributed in London and mainly supports the British Labor Party. The article discusses the announcement of the finding of Hitler's Last Will and Testament and the story of how it was found.
- Screenshot from the Sunday Pictorial (British newspaper) on the 30<sup>th</sup> December 1945.  
<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000844/19451230/001/0001>  
 This newspaper is also published in London and its aim was to find a balance between reporting great issues and also sheer entertainment. The article itself does not go into detail about the document but gives the front page plainly to the fact that the document had been discovered.
- The New York Times, published on the 31<sup>st</sup> December 1945 and 1<sup>st</sup> January 1946  
<https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1946/01/01/93008320.html?action=click&contentCollection=Archives&module=LedeAsset&region=ArchiveBody&pgtype=article&pageNumber=18>  
 This was a mainstream newspaper which reported very thoroughly on the story of Hitler's death and the discovery of his last will and testament. These articles both tell stages of the story of the finding of the documents and where they were targeted to be delivered to.
- The Chicago Tribune, published on the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1946,  
<https://www.newspapers.com/image/371161597/>  
 This newspaper was published in Chicago and was a conservative newspaper. The story itself is one of the most detailed accounts of the tale of the Last Will and Testament and is interesting as it gives the reaction of German prisoners, which is unlike other newspapers at the time.
- [https://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online\\_documents/holocaust/Hitler\\_Will\\_General\\_Intelligence.pdf](https://www.eisenhower.archives.gov/research/online_documents/holocaust/Hitler_Will_General_Intelligence.pdf) - dispatched on January 8<sup>th</sup>, 1946  
 This document is a copied transcript of a US Intelligence report regarding the capture of the original three copies of the Last Will and Testament. In great detail it gives the narrative of how the documents were captured, thus the transfer from German to Allied hands.
- Screenshot from the Morpeth Herald (British newspaper) on Friday 11<sup>th</sup> January 1946.  
<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/bl/0000344/19460111/038/0006>  
 This newspaper, although small, gives the reaction of the British public to the finding of the document. The paper was published by the Mackay family and distributed across many small towns in Northern England.

- Doc. 3569-PS referenced in Nuremberg Trials as part of testimony by Von Schirach on the 138<sup>th</sup> day 24<sup>th</sup> May 1946, accessed at <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/05-24-46.asp>.

This document is a transcript from the Nuremberg Trials found on the Avalon Project. It shows how some defendants used the Last Will and Testament themselves, although the effect of the use is difficult to assess as the defendants were still convicted and sentenced.
- Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The Last Days of Hitler*, (First published in 1947, edition found published by Pan Macmillan, 2013), p. 156

This book discusses the events of Hitler's last days, in particular the events in his bunker, and how the witnesses in the bunker and outside reacted to these events. This page notes that what Hitler was dictating was nothing new, which was unexpected even for a renowned historian such as Trevor-Roper.
- Doc. 3569-PS- referenced in the Nuremberg Trials as part of Transcript for NMT 7: Hostage Case accessed at <http://nuremberg.law.harvard.edu/transcripts/4-transcript-for-nmt-7-hostage-case?seq=10109&q=Hitler+testament> on 6<sup>th</sup> February 1948

This set of Trials at Nuremberg was one of the last where only the United States were presiding over the trials. This document in particular gives the use of the Last Will and Testament to try to persuade judges to act without bias.
- Traudl Junge, *Hitler's Last Secretary: A firsthand account of life with Hitler* (Arcade Publishing, 2003)

This book, written in 1947 but not published until 2002 in German and 2003 in English, gives the firsthand experience of Hitler's secretary of the events that took place in the bunker. The specific passage used focuses on the transcribing of the Last Will and Testament, and gives Junge's reaction to it, similar to that of Trevor-Roper's.
- Astrid Eckert, *The Struggle for the Files: The Western Allies and the Return of German Archives after the Second World War*, (Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 46.

Eckert's tells the story of the search for lost German files and how they were eventually transferred into Allied hands. This passage specifically mentions the Last Will and Testament, and the reaction by Allied leaders on how it should be used.