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# Newsweek

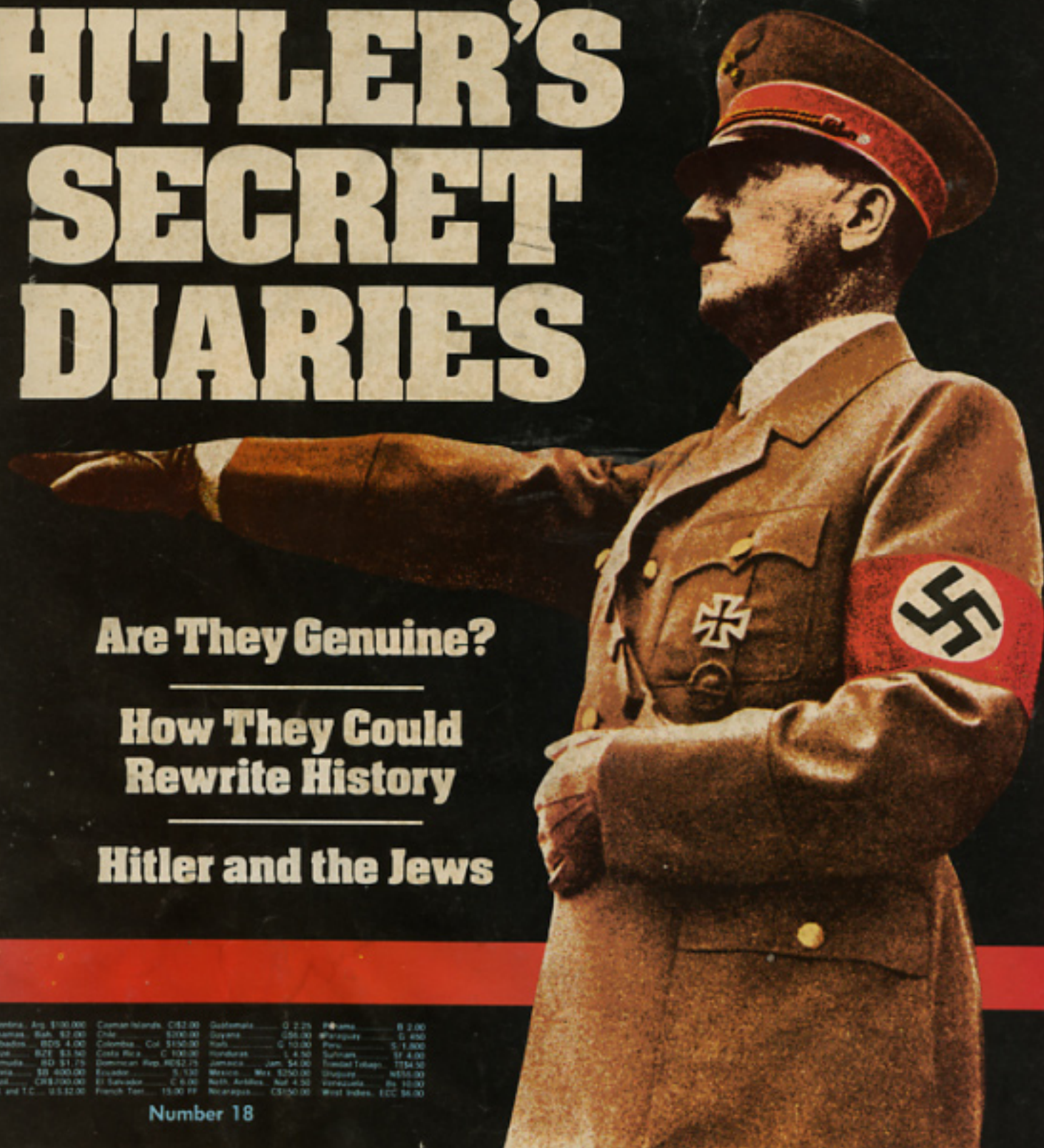
**SPECIAL REPORT**

## HITLER'S SECRET DIARIES

**Are They Genuine?**

**How They Could  
Rewrite History**

**Hitler and the Jews**



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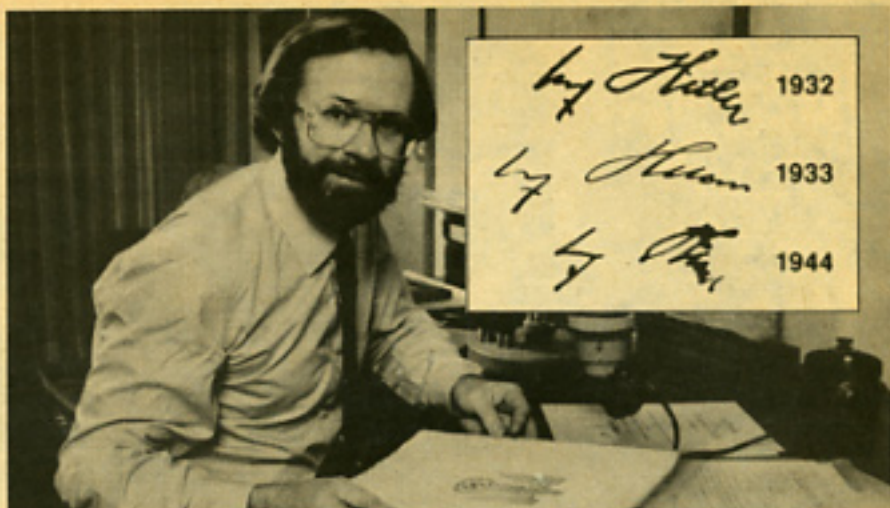
## HITLER'S SECRET DIARIES

ing. "From now on," he writes in 1932, "I shall record my political actions and thoughts in notes, in order to preserve them for posterity like every other politician." In 1943 he remarks: "Bormann asked me recently what I intended to do with these books. I explained to him that I, too, would one day retire when I felt that the time had come, and make way for a younger person. I have recorded my own thoughts in the books so that I shall later be able to form an exact picture of certain events. In that way I shall be able to make an accurate and unchallengeable verdict on everything that happened."

In an essay published last weekend, Trevor-Roper saw the diaries as a calculated appeal to world opinion. "He recorded what he wished posterity to believe," wrote Trevor-Roper, "and no doubt he omitted what he wished them to overlook." That view is shared by other authorities on the Nazi era. "When most of his diary was written," says Professor Weinberg, "he thought that Germany would win or at least that the Third Reich would survive. . . . He was creating his own legend of himself."

Hitler never got a chance to write his memoirs, and in any case his verdicts are far from unchallengeable. But the diaries and the separate volume on Hess do offer some interesting new insights into the early stages of World War II. Stern will devote its next installments of the Hitler papers entirely to the Hess affair, in part because Hess is still alive in Berlin's Spandau prison, where the convicted war criminal will turn 89 this week. When Hess piloted a Messerschmitt 110 to Britain in May 1941 on what he said was a peacemaking mission, Hitler quickly de-

Cover story: Unsealing the diaries



Rendell: Taking a closer look at paper, ink—and Hitler's signatures

## ARE THEY GENUINE?

Are the Hitler diaries genuine or a brilliant, diabolical fraud? *Stern* magazine says historians and handwriting experts have firmly established their authenticity. But *Stern's* experts saw only one page from the Hess volume and a few other documents, not their full contents. And *Stern's* rush to press was sure to raise doubts, not settle them. The German experts would not discuss their procedures last week. Ordway Hilton, a South Carolina document examiner who worked with *Stern*, told *NEWSWEEK* that the documents he tested were genuine. But a great historical paper chase was clearly just beginning.

In his 45 years in the handwriting and document business, Ordway Hilton, 69, has had some fascinating tasks. He accurately denounced Clifford Irving's "autobiography" of Howard Hughes as a fake and cast doubt on the controversial Hughes "Mormon Will." Last April *Stern* editor Thomas Walde and acting publisher Wilfried Sorge came to his door bearing a handful of notes, letters and autographed photos—all known to be in Adolf Hitler's hand. They also brought two pages whose authorship was less certain: a document concerning Rudolf Hess and the text for a telegram to Miklós Horthy, Hitler's Hungarian regent. Hilton's job was to determine if the pages were in Hitler's handwriting. The *Stern* executives "didn't say where the documents came from," says Hilton, "and I didn't ask."

Since Hilton knew only a few words of German, he asked for typed transcripts of the pages. "If you don't know the language, you can go wrong in guessing what somebody meant," he explained. He photographed the pages, enlarged some photos to make a chart and examined others under binocular microscopes. The papers were in good condition, but the handwrit-

ing was nearly illegible, an odd mixture of old German and Latin script. Hilton noted that the "s's," "f's" and "h's" were virtually indistinguishable, the "n's" and "m's" were little more than wavering lines and the "i's" and "e's" were so short they were almost invisible. "These are the individualities that help to identify," he said. He compared the signatures—the curious "Adolf" resembling a double 7; the stylized H, followed by descending zigzags. He looked for telltale signs of forgery, such as odd breaks between letters. After two weeks, Hilton said he reached the point "where there was just no question": both documents were written by Adolf Hitler.

Experts in Europe went through the same process over the following weeks. Dr. Max Frei-Sulzer, former head of forensic services for the Zurich police department, reported that there could be no doubt that both of the documents were written by Adolf Hitler personally. Experts at the Landeskriminalamt, the German FBI, looked at a different set of papers, but their conclusion was the same: the originals could be called authentic with a probability that verged on certainty. Like Hilton, neither knew the historical issue at stake or of the mystery involving Hitler's pilot, Hans Bauer, a plane crash, postwar gatherings on Hermann Göring's yacht or a pipeline into East Germany. None claims to have "authenticated the Hitler diaries." "What I have verified is two samples of writing," said Hilton. "I don't know what's on [other pages] or whether the writing is the same."

The official German criminal lab also conducted a chemical analysis on a sample of notebook paper from the diaries and reported that the sample was "typical of paper used by Germans in the 1930s and 1940s." Other document experts said that



was scant proof of authenticity. "A forger would have no difficulty finding paper and ink that are 40 years old," declared New York handwriting expert Charles Hamilton. "I've had stacks of Hitler's own stationery." Shown photocopies of the same documents Hilton had verified as authentic, Hamilton said, "This is not only a forgery, but a bad forgery." Tiny "hair threads" around the letters, he claimed, might be a tip-off that "new ink was put on old paper." (Hilton stands by his analysis, which was based on originals.) Hitler is extremely popular with forgers. Hamilton receives at least one Hitler forgery a month. "I once got a 'Hitler skull' through the mail," he said. "The guy didn't know Hitler's teeth were very crooked. The skull's teeth were in perfect shape."

A few great forgers have learned to foil authenticators for a time. Clifford Irving's audacious Hughes "autobiography" in 1972 initially fooled not only handwriting experts, but McGraw-Hill and Time Inc., though it netted him 17 months in jail. Reached at his home in Mexico, Irving said it would be possible to forge a set of Hitler diaries. "I'd get a few lengthy samples of Hitler's handwriting—they don't have to be original, copies will do," he said. "I'd shop around for the proper paper and ink. One wouldn't have to do much research—so much has been written about the man." Mastering the handwriting might take only a couple of weeks, Irving mused, and a skillful forger could easily adapt changes in the subject's style. It doesn't take much to fool "internationally renowned handwriting experts," he said. "We learned that back in 1972."

One of those Irving hoodwinked was New York handwriting expert Russell Osborn, who says he mistakenly verified the Hughes papers because he was allowed to see only a fraction of them. "If I were to judge the authenticity of the Hitler diaries, I

would want to look at every volume," he said. Kenneth Rendell, a leading document detective and dealer of historical papers whom NEWSWEEK hired as a consultant on the Hitler diaries, agrees. Parts of the Hitler papers could be genuine and parts could be fake, Rendell suggests. "There's a possibility that the first five years of this are genuine, and then somebody made up the rest." If some diary pages were filled in, Rendell maintains, examination using ultraviolet light and a microscope could spot telltale clues. Pages added to the notebooks later would also show great differences in fluorescence under ultraviolet light. But to make such checks, Rendell points out, an investigator would have to see the entire set of papers.

In fact, to thoroughly authenticate the volumes, Rendell said he would investi-

gate everything—from paper to ink to handwriting to bindings. He would also check into the alleged provenience of the documents. The amount of moisture in the paper, for example, can show whether documents have been kept in an attic or a cellar. He would also compare the writings against historical records and Hitler's "table talks"—notes staffers made of Hitler's dinner conversations—for inconsistencies. And he would examine the seals and backup signatures, which are often shoddily produced in forgeries, he says. A clever forger, he noted, might also buy genuine letters or signatures—about \$250 each—and affix them onto forged volumes.

"I have no evidence whatsoever to believe that the diaries are fakes," Rendell said. "But there's no evidence [so far] to believe they're genuine." Stern's document experts were given "very, very little to work with," he observed. "They were denied access to what they really needed to see." Rendell believes the volumes may well be genuine because the risk of error is so great in a forgery of that size. But without proper investigation, their authenticity may never be completely accepted. "Those who want to believe it will," he laments. "Those who don't can dismiss it. It could be a very important part of history and nobody will really know."

Rendell's prediction may be forestalled if Stern eventually gives the papers to the West German archives, as promised. There, they will presumably be available to historians, document experts and the public for ongoing study and scrutiny. But that is likely to be months or years from now. A thorough examination would take years longer. In the meantime, the debate over the authenticity of Hitler's secrets—and their ultimate value to history—is certain to continue.

MELINDA BECK with MAKS WESTERMAN in New York, VERN E. SMITH in Atlanta and PHYLLIS MALAMUD in Boston

## LAST FLIGHT FROM BERLIN

The Junkers 352 carrying Hitler's papers took off for Salzburg, but crashed near Börnersdorf—in what now is East Germany.



Christopher Blumrich—Newsweek

Baur with an earlier-model Junkers, Göring's yacht, the route from the Nazi capital: A paper chase over a mysterious trail





## SPECIAL REPORT

Goebbels." And after the German invasion of Poland in 1939, Hitler confided to the diaries that "no reprisals [were] to be carried out against the population"—an order which, if he ever gave it, was utterly violated by his Army.

Beyond matters of content were some troubling issues of form. Especially in his later years, Hitler had trouble putting pen to paper. His writing was impaired by shaking hands, perhaps—argue some—because of Parkinson's disease. He also suffered from mental disorders and possibly from injuries to his right arm suffered in a 1944 assassination attempt. And according to tradition, Hitler just did not like to write. Prof. John Reiner of California's Sonoma State University has talked extensively with Hitler's secretary Christa Schroeder, who is still alive in Munich. "She never mentioned Hitler keeping a diary," Steiner said. "He always dictated to his secretaries. Remember that he even dictated Mein Kampf."

If Stern's sources prove less than reliable, the Hitler diaries could have come

from anywhere. West Germany has an extensive, shadowy market in real and fake Nazi memorabilia—and more than one investor has been stung over the years. Material for faking documents in Hitler's name is readily available. A forger could begin with "Hitler, Speeches and Proclamations," a book edited by Max Domarus that details Hitler's utterances from 1932 to 1945—the years covered by the diaries. "Any forger would have a field day with that book," said Prof. Rudolf Binion of Brandeis University. For years historians have been debating many of the points raised in the diaries—including Hitler's attitude toward British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and what Hitler knew about the Hess mission.

**Checks:** Only painstaking analysis of the Stern diaries can clear up all doubts. Historians can check for context. In 1941 Hitler declared war against the United States after Pearl Harbor. "If Hitler wrote nothing about it, we would be suspicious," said Prof. Gordon Craig of Stanford University. "If he said something preposterous, we would be suspicious." Other experts suggested a triv-

ia test. "It is not common knowledge that Hitler saw 'Gone With the Wind' several times," said Joachim Fest, a Hitler biographer. "It may be reasonable to expect that he would have made an entry on that film if he was so impressed by it."

The latest technology can help out the researchers. Language experts can analyze the diaries' syntax and compare it to Hitler's undisputed writings. Handwriting specialists and chemical analysts can have their turn at the documents. An FBI laser in Washington has developed a 40-year-old fingerprint on a postcard. The FBI experts are willing to help investigate the Hitler diaries if West Germany asks—and if someone can supply a matched set of Hitler's fingerprints. For the present, Stern expresses little interest in sharing its scoop with any academics. But not until legitimate scholars have full access to the 60 black booklets will it be possible to determine for certain whether Stern's scoop amounts to history or nonsense.

STEVEN STRASSER with MILAN J. KUBIC in Hamburg, RON MOREAU in Bonn and TESSA NAMUTH and DEBBIE SEWARD in New York City

## A Small Town in Germany

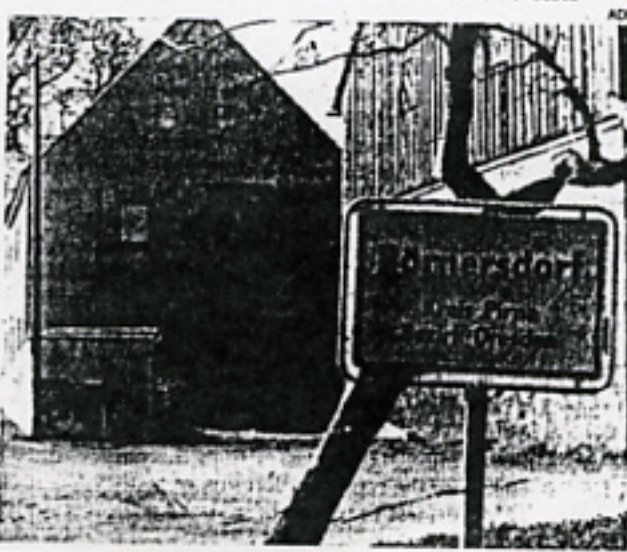
The story of Hitler's purported secret diaries began in the little village of Börnersdorf, southwest of Dresden in what is now East Germany. NEWSWEEK's Maki Westerman drove there last week to test Stern's account of the discovery of the diaries. His report:

The old wooden crosses jutted up among the yellow and purple flowers that flecked the village cemetery. An old woman watered flowers on neater graves nearby. "The diaries of Adolf Hitler?" she said in surprise. "Here in our little Börnersdorf?" Her edge of disbelief quickly spread to the village. "I don't believe it at all," said Richard Elbe, 72, a farmer who was the first to reach the wreck of the Nazi Junkers 352 that crashed near the village some 38 years ago. Elbe also denied that anyone in the town had made off with the diaries. "No one from Börnersdorf took that kind of thing from the plane," he said. "I would have known."

It wasn't quite that simple.

The mayor of Börnersdorf at the time of the crash was a man named Max Göbel. His son Walter (not Erwin as Gerd Heidemann of Stern reported) remembers that his late father did carry away some documents from the plane wreckage. "But he certainly did not have a box with diaries," the younger Göbel said, contradicting Heidemann's account. After the war Göbel lost his job because he had been a Nazi sympathizer. The documents he had were confiscated. The only other things salvaged from the wreck were scraps of the Junkers. Elbe snatched three windows and later used one of them to build a playhouse for children.

Börnersdorf: A secret buried under seven wooden crosses



Heidemann's account of the plane crash, however, is confirmed by the villagers. At about a quarter to six on the morning of April 21, 1945, Elbe still recalls, he saw a burning plane crash near Börnersdorf. "The next moment I didn't see it anymore, and black smoke was circling up in the forest," he said. Elbe and others ran to the crash. The doors on the plane were locked, the survivors could not escape. One passenger, his legs blown off, was screaming for help. The next moment an ammunition cache exploded and the wounded man disappeared in the flames. Another man, buttocks blown away, was hauled from the wreck. He died after two days of agony. The only survivor was a young German named Franz Westermaier. He walked away almost unhurt, then vanished into the middle of the night.

**Graves:** The corpses of the crash victims were placed on a horse-drawn wagon, much as Gerd Heidemann has said. A farmhand named Eduard Grimme, who died in 1979, brought the bodies to the cemetery. "It was just a bunch of charred bits and pieces lying on that wagon," said Elbe. "You could hardly see

they were people." East Germany has observed the right of soldiers to an eternal place of rest, so the graves are still there. Not long ago the son of the pilot who was at the controls of the doomed Junkers 352 turned up with plans for a memorial headstone for his father. The villagers asked him to erect a stone that would also honor the other victims of the crash—including those few whose identities are still unknown. The Börnersdorfers have long been speculating about who they could be. Göbel thinks he knows the identity of at least one. Last week he said quietly, "I have always assumed that Adolf Hitler himself was in the plane and buried in our cemetery."