

Several Key Nazis Took Poison During Closing Days of the War

By M. S. HANDLER

Soviet evidence that Hitler committed suicide with potassium cyanide in his Berlin bunker during the last days of the Third Reich has shed new light on the way of life of the Nazi leaders.

The ancient Greeks and Romans used poison as an instrument of national policy and in dynastic struggles. Poison was also used as an instrument of policy in Renaissance Italy, but at no time was it employed on so widespread a scale as during the Third Reich.

As the Nazi armies crumbled and retreated on the Eastern, Western, and Italian fronts and as the Allied armies approached German territory, Nazis in key positions received capsules of potassium cyanide with which they were to destroy themselves if faced with capture—by the Russians in particular.

The Nazi leaders, who had pursued a policy of mass extermination in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, feared merciless retribution if they fell into Soviet hands.

Himmler Bites Capsule

Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS, the secret police, the criminal police, and finally Nazi Germany's entire police system, committed suicide by biting a capsule of potassium cyanide when he was captured by the British.

Josef Goebbels, his wife and his six children all died of cyanide poisoning in the Berlin Bunker following Hitler's suicide, the Soviet authorities have determined.

Field Marshal Hermann Goering avoided hanging after his conviction at the Nuremberg trial of war criminals by the use of potassium cyanide, which some believe had been smuggled into his cell.

Gen. Hans Krebs, Acting Chief of Staff in the final days, also destroyed himself by cyanide poison, according to the Soviet findings. In his study, "The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich," William L. Shirer reported that it was believed that General Krebs had shot himself.

In traditional European military annals, officers accused of betrayal were sometimes given the choice of suicide by re-

volver. But in the case of Germany's most popular commander, Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, the choice was poison or a revolver.

Hitler gave Marshal Rommel this choice when he learned that the former commander of the Afrika Korps had participated in the July 20, 1944, plot to overthrow him. Marshal Rommel chose poison.

Another general officer, Field Marshal Günther Kluge, also poisoned himself when he was implicated in the plot.

'Scorched Body' Found

Until the Soviet disclosures, which are being published today, it was generally believed that Eva Braun had committed suicide by taking potassium cyanide and that Hitler had shot himself. This version of the deaths was shared by William L. Shirer in "The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich" and by H. R. Trevor-Roper, the English historian, in "The Last Days of Hitler." Both reported that two revolvers had been found but that Eva Braun had not used hers.

In his memoirs published in Moscow on Feb. 21, 1964, Marshal Vassili I. Chuikov, the conqueror of Berlin, said that the Soviet forces found the "scorched body of Hitler" when they stormed the city May 2, 1945. The version in the West was that Hitler committed suicide April 29, that his body was wrapped in a rug, doused with gasoline and burned and that the ashes were strewn through the garden of the Reichschancellery.

Marshal Chuikov wrote: "When the troops of the Eighth Guards broke into the courtyard of the Reich Chancellery on the morning of May 2, they found a still smoking rug and in it the scorched body of Hitler."

Long after evidence that Hitler was dead was accepted by most historians, rumors arose in various parts of the world that the fallen Nazi dictator was alive.

Much as legends in the Middle Ages reporting the presence of a mysterious man in many parts of the world over many decades and even centuries, the specter of a Hitler still alive seemed to haunt people who could not quite believe the tyrant was dead.