

HITLER'S LAST WITNESS

The Memoirs of
Hitler's Bodyguard

ROCHUS MISCH

Introduction by Roger Moorhouse



Hitler's Last Witness

Also by Frontline Books

AT HITLER'S SIDE

The Memoirs of Hitler's Luftwaffe Adjutant
Nicolaus von Below

HE WAS MY CHIEF

The Memoirs of Adolf Hitler's Secretary
Christa Schroeder

HITLER WAS MY FRIEND

The Memoirs of Hitler's Photographer
Heinrich Hoffman

I FLEW FOR THE FÜHRER

The Memoirs of a Luftwaffe Fighter Pilot
Heinz Knoke

I WAS HITLER'S CHAUFFEUR

The Memoir of Erich Kempka
Erich Kempka

I WAS HITLER'S PILOT

The Memoirs of Hans Baur
Hans Baur

WITH HITLER TO THE END

From the Wolf's Lair to the Berlin Bunker
Heinz Linge

THE YOUNG HITLER I KNEW

The Memoirs of Hitler's Childhood Friend
August Kubizek

Hitler's Last Witness

The Memoirs of Hitler's Bodyguard

Rochus Misch

Co-authored by

Michael Stehle, Professor Jörn Precht, Ralph Giordano,
Regina Carstensen and Dr Sandra Zarrinbal

Introduction by Roger Moorhouse



Frontline Books, London



Hitler's Last Witness

This edition published in 2014 by Frontline Books,
an imprint of Pen & Sword Books Ltd,
47 Church Street, Barnsley, S. Yorkshire, S70 2AS

Copyright © Michael Stehle, Überlingen, 2013
Translation © Pen & Sword Books Ltd, 2014
Introduction © Pen & Sword Books Ltd, 2014

ISBN: 978-1-84832-749-8

Publishing History

Originally published in German in 2008 under the title *Der Letzte Zeuge*.
This is the first English language edition and includes an introduction by Roger
Moorhouse and a new introduction by Rochus Misch.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored
in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by
any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise)
without the prior written permission of the publisher. Any person who does
any unauthorized act in relation to this publication may be liable to criminal
prosecution and civil claims for damages.

CIP data records for this title are available from the British Library

For more information on our books, please visit
www.pen-and-sword.co.uk, email info@frontline-books.com
or write to us at the above address.

Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

Typeset in 11/14 point Garamond by Wordsense Ltd, Edinburgh

Contents

List of Illustrations	vii
Acknowledgements	ix
Introduction by Roger Moorhouse	xi
Author's Introduction	1
1 My Childhood: 1917–1937	10
2 Conscripted Soldier: 1937–1939	19
3 The Outbreak of War: 1939	29
4 Hitler Needs a Courier	34
5 My Reich – The Telephone Switchboard	56
6 The Berghof, Hitler's Special Train and Rudolf Hess	63
7 FHQ Wolfsschanze: 1941	84
8 FHQ Wolfsschanze, FHQ Wehrwolf, Stalingrad My Honeymoon: 1942	92
9 The Eastern Front Begins to Turn West	101
10 The Philanderer: 1944	113
11 Weddings and Treason: 1944	117
12 Preparing the Berlin Bunker: February–April 1945	132
13 Bunker Life: The Last Fortnight of April 1945	143
14 Hitler's Last Day: 30 April 1945	169
15 Negotiations and the Goebbels's Children: 1 May 1945	175
16 Break-out and Capture	182
17 My Nine Years in Soviet Captivity	191
18 My Homecoming and New Beginnings	205

CONTENTS

Short Biographies	217
Index	245

Illustrations

1. Rochus Misch at age four.
2. Soldiers in the family: Rochus Misch senior with his comrades.
3. The house where Rochus Misch was born, at Alt-Schalkowitz near Oppeln (Upper Silesia).
4. Rochus Misch's grandparents Franz and Otilie Fronia, around 1930 celebrating their golden anniversary with relatives.
5. Rochus Misch, loner and apprentice, 15 June 1932.
6. Rochus Misch pictured with his classmates and school director Demski.
7. The Olympic stadium, 1 August 1936, where Rochus Misch and his Aunt Sofia saw his later 'boss' for the first time.
8. Rochus Misch with his Hoyerswerda Club, 1934.
9. Wilhelm Mohnke, one of the first SS men in Hitler's 'SS Stabswache Berlin' and commander, 5th Company, *SS-Leibstandarte*.
10. Hitler's sister Paula.
11. Rochus Misch at the Berghof during military training with 5th Company, *SS-Leibstandarte*.
12. Wilhelm-Strasse 77, where Rochus Misch began his duties for Hitler.
13. Innsbruck main railway station, 30 July 1940: a stop off on the way to see Mussolini.
14. The lobby outside Hitler's apartment in the Old Reich Chancellery.
15. Hitler's study in the Old Reich Chancellery.
16. Hitler's private living room before the conversion.
17. The Austrian Joseph 'Joschi' Graf.
18. Hitler's suite in the Old Reich Chancellery.

ILLUSTRATIONS

19. Life as a courier, 1941: Photograph taken by Rochus Misch of his colleagues on a flight from FHQ Wolfsschanze to Berlin.
20. Rochus Misch, with Joseph Graf, in a Ju 52, around 1941.
21. Hitler on board a Ju 52 to the Berghof, 1 June 1943.
22. Field Marshal Erwin Rommel and Hitler, 1942.
23. Hitler's study on the Obersalzberg (Berghof).
24. One of the many soirées in the Great Hall at the Berghof.
25. The 20-metre long, wooden annexe to the Berghof, with its various service rooms.
26. Guests on the Berghof terrace, as photographed by Rochus Misch in 1942.
27. Rochus Misch's favourite photo of his fiancée Gerda.
28. The dog Blondi at play.
29. Eva Braun's dog in the pen with the rabbits.
30. Rochus Misch on the Berghof terrace in the summer of 1941.
31. Rochus Misch at the Berghof, behind the main entrance gate, 1941.
32. Eva Braun on the Berghof terrace looking at photographer Rochus Misch.
33. The Tea House on the Berghof, where Hitler drank apple or caraway tea.
34. Obersalzberg, spring 1944; Hitler returning from the Tea House to the Berghof.
35. Warlord and bodyguard: a photo-montage of Hitler and Rochus Misch.
36. In front of the special train *Amerika*: Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop; Theodor Morell, Hitler's private physician; Hitler; army adjutant Gerhard Engel; and Karl Brandt, Hitler's accompanying physician.
37. Rochus Misch in the dining car of the special train *Amerika*.
38. Rochus Misch in front of the Mönichkirchen railway station, near Wiener Neustadt, 1941.
39. Rudolf Hess, 'the Führer's representative', who flew to Scotland on 10 May 1941 to negotiate peace.
40. On the stairway leading to the Berghof, 7 June 1941, Hitler proceeds upwards with Tsar Boris III of Bulgaria.
41. The telephone exchange in FHQ Wolfsschanze, 1942–3.
42. Lazing at the Moysee near FHQ Wolfsschanze. Rochus Misch with his colleague Karl Weichert and a female stenographer.

ILLUSTRATIONS

43. Waiting for Mussolini at Bahnhof Görlitz, specially created for FHQ Wolfsschanze.
44. The 'reception hall' for Mussolini's visit to Bahnhof Görlitz.
45. In order to defeat the plague of mosquitoes, head nets were issued. Here they are appreciated by Misch and some of his colleagues.
46. The FHQ Wolfsschanze chef standing in front of the special train, *Amerika*, with Willy Arndt and Rochus Misch.
47. Rochus Misch sunbathing at FHQ Wolfsschanze, winter 1941.
48. Professor Theodor Morell, Hitler's personal physician from 1936.
49. Hitler and Mussolini in the Reich government guest house at Schloss Klessheim (near Salzburg), 10 April 1943.
50. Rochus Misch 'taking the cure' at very fashionable Karlsbad, July 1942.
51. FHQ Wehrwolf was the largest of three such installations in the occupied Soviet Union.
52. Hitler's study in a wooden barrack hut at FHQ Wehrwolf.
53. FHQ Wehrwolf staff and the local Ukrainians trading fresh geese for sewing needles.
54. FHQ Wolfsschanze – The Mosquito Home! Rochus Misch on sentry duty in the winter of 1942 in Sperrkreis 1, the so-called Führer Sperrkreis.
55. The inner-circle at FHQ Wolfsschanze, 1942–3: General Erhard Milch, Albert Speer, Hermann Göring, Heinrich Himmler and Colonel Nicolaus von Below.
56. Gerda and Rochus Misch on the day of their marriage, New Year's Eve 1942.
57. Rochus Misch photographed in July 1944 at the entrance to the situation conference barrack hut at FHQ Wolfsschanze.
58. Hitler greeting General Ferdinand Schörner in the situation conference room of the bunker shortly before the end of the war.
59. Rochus Misch on sentry duty in front of Hitler's bunker, 1944.
60. Hitler's last visit to the troops, in Ninth Army HQ, Oderfront, 11 March 1945.
61. The area in the Führerbunker protected by gas-proof sluice doors, at the end of March and the beginning of April 1945.
62. A US soldier in the situation conference room holding the bunker key ring after the capitulation, in 1945.

ILLUSTRATIONS

63. In the Führerbunker, in Berlin, a US soldier searches the bedroom of Eva Hitler née Braun, 1945.
64. American forces search for the immolation site of Hitler and Eva Hitler by the Führerbunker garden exit, June 1945.
65. Plan of the ante-bunker and the Führerbunker, Berlin 1945.
66. The ruined Reich Chancellery, around March 1945.
67. Location of the ante-bunker and Führerbunker on the Reich Chancellery grounds.
68. Hans Krebs, chief of the Army General Staff, in front of the Soviet command HQ in Berlin.
69. 'The war is lost'. The Reich Chancellery in July 1945. View from the Foreign Ministry over the concrete roof of the Führerbunker with the exhaust pipe of the emergency generator.
70. A Russian soldier searching for remains of the immolated corpses of Eva and Adolf Hitler in early June 1945.
71. In June 1945, US investigators examine the sofa on which the couple committed suicide.
72. Hitler's desk inside the bunker.
73. Hitler's bedroom in the deep bunker, 1945.
74. Wilhelm-Platz: Rochus Misch's escape route after leaving the Führerbunker.
75. Rochus Misch and Michael Stehle in 2007.

Acknowledgements

EXCEPT WHERE STATED, THE photographs reproduced in this book are from the private collection of Rochus Misch. The copyright holders for the following photos are:

ACME: 73

akg images: 39

Archiv Alfons Schulz: 22, 43, 54

Archiv preussischer Kulturbesitz: 69

Archiv vereinigte Werkstätten München: 14, 15

Getty Images: 18

Landesarchiv Berlin: 12, 74

Library of Congress: 16

Michael Stehle: 23, 35

National Archives and Records Administration, Washington,
DC: 63, 71

Ullsteinbild: 7, 10, 13, 21, 34, 36, 40, 41, 49, 61, 70

With regard to photographs 14, 58, 61, 62 and 72, by the time editing was concluded on the German-language edition the copyright holders of these photographs had not been identified. The publishers therefore request the holders to contact them for the settlement of claims.

Introduction

WHEN THE NEWS BROKE, in September 2013, of the death of Rochus Misch, it made headlines across the world. It was not Misch's vitally important role in the history of the Third Reich that sparked the interest – he hadn't really had one – rather it was the simple fact that he had been the last surviving witness to the grim denouement of Hitler's regime – the suicide of Adolf Hitler in the Führerbunker in Berlin, on 30 April 1945.

Rochus Misch was born in 1917 in the German eastern province of Upper Silesia. An orphan, he joined the SS in 1937, and – mainly due to his height (he was more than 1.8 metres tall) – found himself in Hitler's bodyguard regiment – *SS-Leibstandarte*. After being severely wounded in the Polish campaign of 1939, he was appointed to Hitler's household staff, initially as a 'man-Friday' and later as a telephonist. It was in this capacity, serving his master to the very last days of the Third Reich, that Misch would make his modest mark on history.

Misch never sought publicity or even intended to write his biography. As he explains in his introduction – specially written for this volume only months before his death in 2013 – he wrote this book in 2008 to meet the growing interest that the world had in him, as well as to correct what he perceived as a few popular misconceptions. After returning from Soviet internment in 1953, he had settled into an ordinary and unremarkable life – one that history only caught up with

INTRODUCTION

after 2000, when he emerged as one of the few remaining survivors of Hitler's bunker. In time, he became the only survivor.

But, for all that serendipity, Rochus Misch had a story to tell. As a member of Hitler's SS Escort, he would accompany the Führer wherever he went. Whether in the Chancellery in Berlin, on the Obersalzberg or in the Wolfsschanze HQ in East Prussia, he would always be close to Hitler, one of the small group of guards who had to be within sight or sound of the dictator at all times. This naturally afforded him a tremendous opportunity to observe life at the pinnacle of the Third Reich, including the personalities and characters involved – not least Hitler himself, who knew Misch by name.

This memoir is the product of that proximity. Misch saw Hitler's household close up, in action; he noticed the difference between the public and private faces, and got to peek behind the curtain. Sometimes the experience could be alarming, as when he blundered into a guest room in Hitler's private suite one morning, only to find Eva Braun in her nightdress: 'She said nothing,' he writes, 'but merely raised her right forefinger to her closed lips.' Clearly, Misch had the sort of 'access' that historians (and gossips) would have killed for.

On one level, then, Misch certainly delivers. His memoir is full of details, asides and digressions, which allow the reader a rare and fascinating insight into the Third Reich's inner sanctum. Hitler, he says, was just 'the Boss', a 'normal, simple man' who was 'neither a monster nor a superman'. Eva Braun, meanwhile, was 'gay and carefree, almost childlike', with a 'zest for living'. Goebbels was popular with the staff, while Bormann was not. Misch overheard conversations, watched the comings and goings and was a keen observer of events. He was present, for example, when Hitler received news of Hess's flight to Britain in May 1941; he listened in when Hitler spoke on the telephone with Major Remer in the aftermath of the 20 July bomb plot, inspiring the latter to lead the crushing of the Stauffenberg coup in Berlin. He was as close to being a 'fly on the wall' as one could get.

INTRODUCTION

Yet, for all that, Misch's view of events is a curiously myopic one. For one thing, the rarefied, claustrophobic atmosphere of the Führer's headquarters was clearly not the ideal location from which to gain a rounded perspective. Misch barely *saw* the world outside, much less was able to make sense of it. The eye of the storm, one could surmise, is rarely the best place from which to view the resulting carnage.

Another inhibiting factor was Misch's own nature. He was, in essence, a simple provincial lad – someone who joined the SS because he saw it as a short cut to a secure career in the service of the state, and was given the job in Hitler's household as he was considered someone who would 'give no trouble'. Misch, certainly, was that man. He kept his head down, did his job, didn't gossip, didn't ask questions and didn't speak out of turn. He was essentially apolitical – naïve even. As this memoir demonstrates, he was clearly no fanatic, and was no militarist – naturally preferring the soft leather boots and tailored uniforms of headquarters to the mud and blood of the front. He was not even a member of the Nazi Party, and claimed that joining the NSDAP (National Socialist Party) 'never even occurred to [him]'.

Consequently, most of what we now understand as the dominant narrative of Nazi Germany seems to have passed Rochus Misch by entirely. He claims to have first heard about the Holocaust, for example, only after returning from Soviet internment in 1953. And, astonishingly, he wonders aloud in these very pages whether he ever noticed that Hitler 'hated the Jews'. To our modern sensibilities, this is baffling, and it is easy to assume that Misch is simply dissembling, by hiding his own knowledge of, and perhaps even complicity in, Nazi Germany's most heinous crimes. But, I would suggest that this assumption should be resisted. To my mind, this is not an example of a cunning memoirist airbrushing his own memories (Misch had many character traits, but one does not get the impression that 'cunning' was among them). Rather, I would argue that such apparently glaring omissions are the result of Misch's own rather unquestioning nature combined with the blinkering effect of his close proximity to Nazi

INTRODUCTION

power. The omissions are also a useful corrective – an example of the tremendous benefits afforded by hindsight and a reminder of the adage: ‘The past is a foreign country, they do things differently there.’

What is more genuinely surprising about this memoir is the author’s evident lack of any real perspective on the events to which he was a witness. Despite the intervening years, Misch comes across as strangely unreflective, even unrepentant in nature. His comments about Hitler’s would-be assassin – Claus von Stauffenberg – are a good case in point. With seven decades of hindsight, one might have expected Misch to have developed a more nuanced, sympathetic view of the assassin and what he was trying to achieve. But no; Misch voices a similar opinion here to that which he might have given back in 1944; Stauffenberg was ‘a murderer of his colleagues,’ he writes. ‘There was really nothing worse.’ There is no hint of contrition in Misch; no expression of the collective *mea culpa* voiced by Hitler’s secretary Traudl Junge, for example, nor even of the sense of retrospective regret expressed so eloquently after the war by Hitler’s former foreign press chief, Ernst Hanfstaengl, who said: ‘You get on a bandwagon and it turns out to be a dustcart.’¹ This is perplexing and a little disappointing, but in Misch’s case one senses that it is motivated more by a simple lack of imagination than by any lingering ideological fealty.

Yet, despite his limitations, one should not assume that Misch is an uninteresting or unenlightening source. He is neither. His observations, certainly, are more ‘kitchen sink’ than ‘kitchen cabinet’, but that does not invalidate them; they still have much to teach us. Purists can sometimes get rather sniffy about ‘human interest’ in history – complaining, for example, that the fact that Hitler kissed ladies’ hands, or chatted amiably with his secretaries tells us nothing of substance about the Third Reich. On the superficial level, they are right of course. We are brought no nearer to understanding the Holocaust by knowing Hitler’s dietary habits. And yet, I would suggest that such

1 Quoted in Peter Conradi, *Hitler’s Piano Player*, London 2005, p. 325.

INTRODUCTION

information does play a role. It is of interest in its own right, of course, but it also serves a more profound purpose: not only that of explaining the dynamic provided by Hitler's personal charisma, but also that of reminding us of our shared humanity with an otherwise rather two-dimensional monster. It is too easy, in my opinion, to dismiss Hitler as a breed apart – not like us. Acknowledging his humanity, in contrast – the hand kissing, as well as the hatred – makes his crimes all the more horrific.

In addition, it is Misch's very ordinariness that makes his account rather instructive. Though his rather cosseted, privileged war was not the same as that of the average Berliner, his views, prejudices and blind spots most certainly were. Consequently, his recollections are almost as interesting for the things that he doesn't say as for the things he does. One gets the impression, indeed, that Misch represented the kind of rather bovine, uncritical, unthinking type that provided the very backbone of the Nazi regime – being obedient, unquestioning, 'making no trouble'. Without Misch, and many thousands like him, the Third Reich would simply have been unable to function.

When Rochus Misch died, the media was primarily excited by the fact that he was the last surviving witness of Hitler's final days. With his passing, the sole living link with the tumultuous, bloody demise of the Third Reich was finally severed. This was certainly true, but Misch signified a lot more than just an accident of longevity. For all his blind spots, he gives us vivid detail about everyday life in Hitler's innermost circle, and by extension provides an insight into the thoughts and feelings of a generation of ordinary Germans. He was a remarkable eyewitness to a fascinating period.

© Roger Moorhouse 2014

Author's Introduction

I NEVER INTENDED TO write my biography. In the course of my life I granted countless interviews to authors, newspaper reporters, historians and television teams from all over the world, rather fewer from Germany. It has all been said, so I thought. The fact that the questions reaching me by post and telephone over the last few years have increased, and not the opposite, taught me otherwise. The letters are overwhelmingly friendly and interested, and they come mainly from young, often very young people. I have a bad conscience about having left so many unanswered. I am an old man and can no longer handle the onslaught. Not long ago I decided to go ex-directory, because many international telephone calls came at night, because of the time lag. For decades my telephone number had been in public directories, but now the interest in me has grown so large that I have had to protect myself in this way.

Why has this interest expanded? I think that with the increasing passage of time since the 1933–45 period, young people simply have fewer worries about digging up the past than the previous generation. For them, it is perfectly clear that one can only learn from history if one knows it. And what is written in the history books has for some time not answered everything. In addition, I have to state this soberly and with resignation – there is the race against time. The opportunity will not exist much longer to put questions to such eyewitnesses as myself.

HITLER'S LAST WITNESS

This book is, therefore, for me first of all an unburdening of my workload; henceforth, I can refer interested people to my memoirs. From very recent documentaries about events of which I am today the last surviving witness, I have become aware that my impressions may be an important source for understanding. I observe that certain representations which I know for certain to be false, or that in any case I saw, perceived or recall the basic events and circumstances differently, threaten to become historical fact. I would now like to explain what I mean.

As a result of my involvement with the American film-makers of the Hollywood drama *Valkyrie* in the summer of 2007, I became aware that numerous errors of fact were presented in the public domain. This was a film about the failed attempt on Hitler's life on 20 July 1944. I was asked all things imaginable, from routine security measures to Hitler's habits. The team appeared well informed, yet I was surprised at so much incorrect presentation.

I noticed this particularly some time before in connection with the sensational world release of *Der Untergang* (*Downfall*) – an important film, if a comic-opera type tragedy. 'I' was to be seen in a couple of scenes: the representative of my person did not have a speaking role. It was shown how this actor discovered the bodies of the generals Wilhelm Burgdorf and Hans Krebs after their suicides. Why was I not asked how it really happened? Then they might have learnt that I did not react in the least in a calm, almost business-like way, as the film showed. On the contrary, I was extremely agitated to find that Burgdorf, whom I touched gently to tell him he had a telephone call waiting for him, had not nodded off, but was dead. I went off immediately to report the deaths of the two generals. A detail. Nevertheless, it gave a false impression, for I was anything but composed at that moment.

In the final hours in the Führerbunker, one thought above all others made me panic, and it had nothing to do with the Russians or the dead Hitler, but Gestapo Müller! I had seen the head of the Gestapo at RSHA (SS-Reichssicherheitshauptamt/Reich Main Security Office) in the

New Reich Chancellery. His presence was completely strange. Hannes – a technician who also had remained to the last in the bunker – and I speculated whether we would now all be eliminated. Maybe they would blow up the bunker? Better to destroy everything than have it fall into the hands of the Russians – and we had to reckon that that might go for us too. Was nothing and nobody to escape the Führer bunker?

During April 1945, silence – a deathly silence – reigned in Hitler's bunker flat below the garden of the Old Reich Chancellery. There was no excited coming and going. The actual Führerbunker consisted of a couple of small cell-like rooms. Apart from Eva Braun, only Hitler's valet and his physician Dr Morell had rooms in which they lived; later, Goebbels moved in with the doctor. All other rooms were for official purposes. Only by my small telephone switchboard was there a 'public' sitting area to offer anyone. The portrayed hectic scenes before the end in *Der Untergang* – most of them occurred in the cellars of the New Reich Chancellery, many in the ante-bunker. The film had almost everything played out in Hitler's bunker apartment, to which only a few ever came, if summoned to 'the boss'. In the Führerbunker, deeper underground than cellars and the ante-bunker, death had already taken up lodgings long before Hitler put the gun to his head. The war could only be heard from the ante-bunker and in the Reich Chancellery cellars. In Hitler's domain there was only some shaking and dull noises to be felt and heard. On the other hand, it was not possible to know about events in the deep bunker if one was in the ante-bunker or in the remote cellars of the New Reich Chancellery.

The day before the release of *Der Untergang* in Berlin, I received a telephone call in the late evening. It was somebody from the production team letting me know that I had been requested not to appear at the première. No reason was given. Five weeks later, producer Bernd Eichinger visited me at my Berlin house. He was researching something new. Mentioning *Der Untergang*, Herr Eichinger referred to the book of the same name by Joachim Fest, which had been the

HITLER'S LAST WITNESS

basis for the film. They had set store by it, and my role was based on it. Yet Herr Fest had never spoken to me personally.

I was barely twenty-eight years old when the Third Reich went down. After Hitler's death I maintained the telephone connection to the Russians, and after my official release by Reich chancellor Joseph Goebbels I removed all the plugs from the telephone installation. For five years – the last five years of Hitler's life – I lived wherever Hitler lived: in the Führer-apartment in the Old Reich Chancellery, in the Führer-HQs and finally in the Führerbunker.

I am an insignificant man, but I have experienced significant matters. Many thought – in connection with their relationship to Hitler – they should make themselves seem less or more important according to how the information was to be used. I saw no reason why I should do any such thing. I was always an apolitical person.

Completely in contrast to my wife, who was an SPD (Social Democratic Party) politician, even at one time a member of the Chamber of Deputies in Berlin, I was never a Party member, neither of the SPD nor of the NSDAP (National Socialist Party). I never volunteered for the Waffen-SS. I was recruited for the SS-Verfügungstruppe (VT), enticed by the possibility of state service. I would like to have gone into the Reichsbahn (state railways). Only later did the SS-Verfügungstruppe become the Waffen-SS.¹

Having recovered from a serious wound in the Polish campaign and back with my unit, one day my company commander chose me for a post at the Reich Chancellery. I went there as ordered, and the following day, either 1 or 2 May 1940,* I began service there. My new boss was Adolf Hitler.

1 The SS-Verfügungstruppe (VT) was the forerunner of the Waffen-SS: after the outbreak of war the Waffen-SS came into being by a merger of the VT with the SS-Totenkopf units.

* Rochus Misch contradicts himself concerning the exact date he started work with Hitler. In fact, both 1 and 2 May were holidays in 1940. According to Russian reports, he began on Monday 6 May 1940.

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

Today there are long debates about whether Hitler can be portrayed as a 'private' man at all, even as 'a person,' but it is very difficult for me to separate the two. I knew him only as a person. A person who was my boss and to whom my welfare was important. He was a boss who had his own physician examine me when I felt bad, who spontaneously gave permission for me to be absent to see a girl, who upon my marriage sent me two cases of the most select wines and made a special payment assuring my life in the enormous sum of 100,000 Reichsmarks, and who never shouted at me. If nevertheless I felt a little uneasy in his presence, that was simply because he was 'my boss'.

I tried to carry out all my duties to the best of my ability, as was expected. While doing so, I enjoyed the many liberties my service often brought in its train, and I played pranks on those colleagues with whom I had a good relationship. I was careful to avoid blunders, such as made by two of my colleagues when they created model panzers for their children after seeing a demonstration of new weapons; this got them sent back to the fighting front. Heavy field boots sinking into mud and filth instead of extra light, dazzling made-to-measure boots on thick carpet – no thank you. Conscious of the front, I was careful to present myself exactly as the man who had been selected expressly for my task – somebody who gave no trouble.

I did not like being a soldier; having a rank was not something that mattered to me. Throughout my service I was in the lower ranks (finally Oberscharführer).² The possibilities of promotion to higher rank for a member of the Führer's personal bodyguard were in any case limited. Because of that, five close friends volunteered for the front – and only two came back, one of them Otto Günsche, who then became Hitler's adjutant.

Well, for me the front was far away, marriage near, work in the bodyguard rich in variety and, in comparison to a soldier's lot, a relaxed life. As long as we made sure that the shifts were covered, we

2 The SS rank Oberscharführer was the equivalent of sergeant in the German army.

could change them as we liked. At the Berghof (Obersalzberg), which had its own telephonist, it was like being on holiday.

Obviously I am aware that I am not speaking of any old job and just any boss. It was clear to me then that I was in a special place among people in a genuine position of note. I know – today – what went on in Germany and elsewhere in the name of Germany while I was serving Leni Riefenstahl tea, sitting with Erwin Rommel at the cloakroom table looking at his Afrika Korps photos or hearing from Hitler's study the fine voice of the Jewish chamber singer Joseph Schmidt, whose gramophone records the boss loved so much. At that time I did not know.

I neither attended the military situation conferences nor was I a personal conversation partner of Hitler's, unlike the adjutants. So what can I describe? In my experience of the last few years it is young people who ask me, not to confirm long-known facts or find out about Hitler as 'a person', but how did one get into his closest circle? How did one get to be his telephonist in the bunker? What was everyday life like in the power centre of Hitler's Germany for people such as I? What were my feelings about the course of the war and the defeat as perceived from where I stood? These are the questions of many young people, which I attempt to answer in this book.

It certainly remains a matter of interest what went on in the last days of Hitler's life, what the bunker looked like and what details and facts I remember which belong to the world history of today. However, the things that have stuck in my memory, which at the time seemed important or an invaluable experience, inevitably do not always coincide with what was important historically. It is not easy to put myself back into the centre of my experiences.

For this biography I have separated out much that would interfere when reporting on things as I perceived them. The following account aims to be as free as possible of retrospective assessments, now that I know the extent of the horror, but, like many others, I was not aware of until long after the end of the war. Only then can I become again the Rochus Misch of his mid-twenties, a man who has not existed for more than sixty years.

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

This book is not a justification. I was given the post with Hitler because my company commander was certain that I would not cause trouble. I took the post because I was a soldier, and I kept it because my company commander was right.

I do not reproach myself today that I did my job under the circumstances that then existed, that I always did it in an orderly and conscientious manner even when I realised in 1943 that the war would be lost, even when it had long been lost, and even as Hitler's body burnt. No, I do not reproach the Rochus Misch of that time because he didn't make trouble.

All the same, because events at that time were so self-evident they do make me reflective. I used to listen to my father-in-law talk about the old SPD times, hear enemy radio broadcasts with him – and then off I would go to work again at the Reich Chancellery. I managed to get Uncle Paul out of a concentration camp – and then I went back to Hitler. In July 1944, I paid no further heed to talk of Final Victory, but when, after the assassination attempt, the telephone connection to the living Hitler at FHQ Wolfsschanze was restored, I felt at that moment relief, if only because the nerve-tearing tension about the uncertain command situation was ended.

It was never necessary to compel myself to fulfil my duties unconditionally. I never struggled inwardly over them – never hesitated. Only at the very end, overwhelmed by worry about my wife and daughter, only then did I consider doing something contrary to my oath. But then I remained at my post in the bunker until the new Reich chancellor Joseph Goebbels released me officially as the last man. I was a soldier. I had my duty, my instructions, my place to be. And I had a good place to be, in contrast to my comrades in the field. I brought mountains of despatches to Hitler and relayed countless conversations, but I never saw the whole thing again nor looked for it. I did not bother. I asked no questions when it was best to ask none, but I also raised no questions when I could have done. I tell it as it is: the young Rochus had few queries.

HITLER'S LAST WITNESS

As one of Hitler's bodyguards, I spent most of the time standing around; as his telephonist, I pressed buttons at the switchboard; and as a courier, I transported paper across the district. In the future that would be condemned by the Russian authorities as 'support for the Nazi regime'. Who of my generation, however, did not make himself guilty in this sense?

When I am asked what my duties were for Hitler, I frequently answer: 'Simply to be there.' I am very pleased about that today. Nothing else was required of me but to 'simply be there'. And what if it had been different? How far would my sense of duty, obedience and the oath to Hitler have stretched? I am glad I escaped the test. Many comrades were not so fortunate.

I am also relating my story to young people so that they do not neglect to ask the right question at the right time. To put people on the right track as to why I and so many others failed to do this, where possible I report things as I saw them then.

I want to portray my path as it happened: from Silesia via the Oberlausitz and the Black Forest to Berlin into the Reich Chancellery; from Obersalzberg into the East Prussian FHQ Wolfsschanze; then direct from the Führerbunker into the torture chamber of the NKVD (Soviet secret service) at Moscow's Lubyanka prison; the various work camps at Karaganda (Kazakhstan), Borovichi (Oblast Novgorod), Sverdlovsk (Ukraine) and Stalingrad; and finally after almost nine years as a prisoner of war (POW) back to Berlin again. My notes, which I wrote in February 1954 with the help of my wife after my return from the Soviet Union, support my memories which I have repeated orally in extensive conversations and are now sketched in this book.

When my memoirs appeared in book form in Germany in 2008 I did not anticipate anything like the enormous interest they would generate in the public. I was simply content that I could now refer many enquirers to the book. Extracts from it appeared in the important magazine *Bild* in Germany in a preview a week before publication. This was a five-part series expected to reach 40 million readers. Diverse

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

reviews followed in the press and online, and very soon the book became a German-language bestseller. As a result of its great success, a reprint came out a year later as a paperback edition.

From the outset foreign interest in my memoirs was very great. Almost daily I continued to receive a large postbag from all over the world, and people rang me from abroad. Often the language barrier prevented me from talking and answering the questions they had about those past events.

In the summer of 2011 the 'James Bond' director Roger Spottiswoode visited me from the United States with a plan to present my German memoirs in an international film using a team of authors and translators. Often my small living room was 'bursting at the seams'. Special lighting effects would be set up, details recorded by camera. I continued to be asked by newspapers and television companies from all over the world for interviews. Because of my age, as I have said it is ever more rarely possible for me to agree to these requests.

In 2006 I was visited in my Berlin home by the Überlingen agent Michael Stehle. After many meetings with him and his assistant Dirk Mosel, I decided in 2012 to allow their agency to handle all enquiries addressed to me. Shortly after taking this decision, I was extremely pleased when Michael Stehle informed me that work would soon be under way for an English-language translation of my book.

As the last surviving eyewitness to Hitler's demise in the bunker, it pleases me that the many English-language speakers with an interest in that historical period will now have the opportunity to read my memoirs. Although I was not present at the conferences in which Hitler's political decisions were taken, perhaps the lesser 'historically relevant' details perceived by a man in his mid-twenties during his everyday duties may make things clearer. I asked no questions back then. But asking questions about that past may perhaps help us today, to ask the right questions at the right time.

Rochus Misch
June 2013

Chapter 1

My Childhood: 1917–1937

‘But he thanked God for allowing him to experience all kinds of misfortune, and spent five whole years in the dungeon.’

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, ‘Sankt-Rochus-Fest zu Bingen’
(The Orphan Boy from the Village)

THE VENERABLE SANKT ROCHUS is honoured in Europe as a curer of the plague. Born in Montpellier in the thirteenth century, he had the gift of protecting people against epidemics. On 16 August 1814, Goethe attended the dedication of the Rochus Chapel at Bingen on the Rhine, in honour of the saint, and in his essay ‘Sankt-Rochus-Fest zu Bingen’ he described his impressions of that day. The name Rochus itself comes from the Old High German word *rohon* (roar) or from the Yiddish terms *rochus* and *rauches* (annoyance, anger), and the French *rouge* (red). As it so happens, the venerable Rochus was born with a red cross on his chest – a sign of his divine selection.

I found all this out a long time ago when I developed an interest in my uncommon Christian name. Whether my mother knew the story when she named me I have no idea. Equally, I do not know if my grandparents intentionally chose the plague-healer as patron of their son, my father. Rochus was my father’s name, and it was also mine. Probably I would not have been given it had my father survived my

birth. After my elder brother Bruno, I am the second son of Rochus and Victoria Misch, and had my father wished to pass on his name he would surely have given it to his first-born son. However, my mother wanted me to have the name of her dead husband.

My father was a builder, while my mother Victoria worked for the Berlin public transport. Bruno was born when my parents lived on the Händelplatz, Berlin-Steglitz, but shortly afterwards, when the First World War began, the family moved to Alt-Schalkowitz¹ near Oppeln in Upper Silesia. My mother's parents lived there. I assume she did not want to spend the war alone in Berlin, as my father was quickly sent to the front.

In July 1917 my mother was very advanced in her pregnancy with me. My father was in a field hospital at Oppeln. He had been returned from the front seriously wounded, shot through a lung and missing his thumbs. Shortly before the expected date for my birth, he was allowed to leave hospital. He therefore went home, where everybody was awaiting my arrival. One night, my father suddenly had a haemorrhage and died next morning. The undertakers came to fetch him, and my mother wept and shouted as they carried the coffin past her. The midwife was already in the house and stood by helplessly. A few hours later, on that 29 July 1917 I was born.

When I was two and a half, my mother died of pneumonia following influenza. My brother Bruno met with a fatal bathing accident on 2 May 1922. His right side was stiff, probably as the result of a stroke brought on by the ice-cold water in our small brook. It took fourteen days for him to die.

Now I was quite alone with my grandparents. I was still too young to understand that I had lost my whole family within the first five years of my life: father, mother, brother. My grandparents Fronia, my mother's parents, spoke little of their daughter. They did not even have a photograph of her hanging somewhere. So I grew up without even

1 In 1936, as a result of the National Socialist policy of Germanising Polish-sounding names, Alt-Schalkowitz was renamed Alt-Schalkendorf.

having a picture of my parents. Nevertheless – or perhaps because of that – I did not consciously miss my father and mother. At first, my grandmother was my guardian. Later, in the 1930s, when she was too old for it, the duty was transferred to my mother's sister, my Aunt Sofia Fronia in Berlin.

Despite this tragic start in life, I have only good memories of my childhood. However, I must have been very ill once as a small boy. I was told I had had the English Disease.² I remember that I was taken to a special hospital in the Altwatergebirge mountains for treatment, but I do not know how I got there and how long I stayed. Apparently, they knew how to treat it.

After eight years of elementary school, my grandfather wanted me to learn a trade. He would tell me interesting stories, and in Berlin he had worked on the building of the Teltow canal. This was a big project, which had opened in 1906 – no fewer than 10,000 men had worked on it. It was very important for him that one did something 'with one's hands', develop one's talent for something. Thus, he got me to learn the mandolin. The master tailor in the village taught me this instrument.

I well remember my grandfather having a big row with the school director Demski, when he took me out of school. The director was adamant that I should continue my education and go to a higher school in Oppeln – I had good grades. However, grandfather had decided against it, even though the director visited us at home in an effort to convince him. To no avail. It was obvious to my grandfather that I should learn a trade. To his great joy, I had an 'A' in Art, and so it was quickly decided that I should be a painter. Grandfather would brook no opposition, being a thorough-going Prussian authoritarian, but in any case I had no objections.

My cousin Marie from Hoyerswerda, who happened to be visiting us when my grandfather had this row with the school director, obtained for me in 1932 through her husband's contacts an apprenticeship with

2 The 'English Disease' was rickets, an illness caused by vitamin D deficiency.