

FARAGO László

1974

## The ramifications of Nazism

# Aftermath

Martin Bormann and  
the Fourth Reich.

By Ladislav Farago.

Illustrated. 479 pp.

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By **TERENCE PRITTE**

Martin Bormann, the head of Adolf Hitler's Reich Chancellery and, during the last years of the Nazi era, perhaps the most powerful man in the Nazi party after Hitler himself, was a strangely faceless, almost obscure figure. Professor Hugh Trevor-Roper, the author of "The Last Days of Hitler," called him "a mole-like creature, who seemed to avoid the glare of daylight and publicity." Hitler's chief of intelligence, Walter Schellenberg, concentrating rather on Bormann's external appearance, thought that he resembled "a pig in a potato field." At the end of the Second World War Bormann disappeared in the ruins of Berlin during the final stages of the futile Nazi defense of the old Reich capital against the Red Army. Although generally presumed to be dead, he was sentenced to death in *absentia* by the international war crimes tribunal at Nuremberg on Oct. 1, 1946. For nearly 30 years since then the circumstances of his death, or survival, have remained shrouded in mystery.



Martin Bormann.

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Professor Trevor-Roper, who had investigated the circumstances of Hitler's own death with brilliant acumen, was inclined to believe that Bormann died too, almost certainly on May 2, 1945. On that day he and others of Hitler's immediate entourage set out to escape from Berlin, although by then it was completely surrounded and almost totally in the hands of the Russians. Escape was by no means a hopeless quest—a number of Nazis achieved it. But evidence of Bormann's death was supplied by Arthur Axmann, who had succeeded Baldur von Schirach as head of the Hitler Youth and who himself managed to reach Bavaria before being captured by United States Intelligence officers. Axmann saw him lying on his back on the Invalidenstrasse, close to the Lehrter railway station. He seemed

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to be dead, although Axmann could see no sign of a wound. Axmann supposed that he had been shot in the back; others have suggested that he swallowed the poison capsule that most Nazi leaders carried. Because all other evidence supplied by Axmann was proved to be accurate, Professor Trevor-Roper was inclined to accept his statement about Bormann. But he admitted that it was not conclusive; night had already fallen and Axmann saw the body by moonlight.

Ladislav Farago's book sets out to prove that Bormann did not die in the ruins of Berlin, that he escaped to the north German province of Schleswig-Holstein and from there, via Italy to South America, and that he is still alive today, living quietly in the San Isidro borough of the Argentinian capital of Buenos Aires. To support the facts relating to his present whereabouts, and to his domicile during the past quarter of a century in half a dozen South American countries, the author has quoted copiously from the documentation of Argentinian Government offices and intelligence agencies. Bormann, according to Farago, has been one of a very great many Nazis who found their way to South America—some of them with the help of the Vatican, but



mostly under the aegis of ex-Nazi and S.S. underground organizations—in order to found a “nebulous Fourth Reich” there. The book contains much fascinating material about other Nazi war criminals who were aided and protected by networks like the “Kameradenwerk” and “Der Spinne”—the “Spider’s Web.” They include Josef Mengele, who selected victims for the Nazi gas chambers, Franz Stangl, the commandant of the Treblinka extermination camp, Klaus Barbie, mass-murderer of French Jews and members of the French Resistance, and Herbert Cukurs, the “butcher of Riga.” Indeed, these men, and many others mentioned by Farago, are known to have lived in South America since the war, or to be still living there.

What, then, is the truth about Bormann? This, at all events, is the story that Farago has pieced together. Bormann reached Schleswig-Holstein and was probably hidden for a time in the S.S. military hospital of Graasten, just inside Denmark. By March, 1946, he was somewhere in the vicinity of the town of Merano, in the Italian Tyrol, where his wife was dying of cancer. He stayed on in the area, living in or around Bolzano under the name of Luigi Bogliolo, and was shipped to the Argentine in May, 1948, traveling with a Vatican passport made out in the name of the Reverend Juan Gomez. In Buenos Aires he registered with the Papal Nuncio as Eliezer Goldstein, and was given a permit of permanent residence by Argentinian authorities on Oct. 12, 1948. Both his escape from Europe and his establishment as an Argentinian resident, in fact, owed much to the help of the Vatican.

According to Farago, Bormann has since then lived in at least six South American countries. Apart from the Argentine, they included Chile, Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay and Peru. Thus his first move was to Brazil, where he acquired a new identity, that of Jose Perez, a man who had in fact been born in Bolivia in 1901—a year later than Bormann himself. His next alias was that of “Father” Augustin von der Lange-Lenbach. In 1969 Bormann was well-established in Chile, but in May, 1972, he was lying ill in the Central Military Hospital of Asuncion, the capital of Paraguay. He was in Chile once more at the end of 1972, after medical treatment in Buenos Aires where he apparently underwent grafting treatment for cell renewal. Then in 1973 he retired to an out-of-the way

corner of Bolivia, apparently to die, and Farago claims to have actually seen him there. Bormann had given up all will to live—and one should recall that, in earlier years, he had claimed that he never had any “premonition of death” and was imbued with “a burning desire to live.” But the return to power in the Argentine of Juan Peron, formerly his friend and protector, restored his hopes and brought him back to Buenos Aires.

Farago maintains that Bormann and other leading Nazis smuggled vast sums of money with them into exile in South America. The money was a part of the loot which the Nazis collected from occupied Europe, and it has enabled German war criminals to live in luxury for the rest of their lives. They have, of course, had their worries; Allied and Israeli intel-

ligence officers have searched high and low for them, but only a handful have been extradited. Of those wanted for bestial crimes, Adolf Eichmann was successfully kidnapped by Israeli agents, and Cukurs was killed by unknown assailants. What has happened in South America is an intrinsic part of the overall scarcely satisfactory picture of war criminals and their retribution. According to the records of the Ludwigsburg Center for the Investigation of Nazi War Crimes in West Germany, just half of the 100 000 German war criminals faced trial, and only 5,025 were given sentences. Of the 818 sentenced to death, 489 were executed. Long, long ago the prevailing feeling in West Germany itself was that war-crimes trials had become outdated and irrelevant. Witnesses were hard to find or had genuinely forgotten exactly what had happened 30 years ago, and the criminals themselves were usually old men with nothing much left to live for.

Bormann, of course, falls into a special category; for that reason, he has already been condemned to death and for that reason, in turn, he has lain very low indeed—if he has in fact been living all this time. Farago has an imposing list of sources, but he has not used his documentation altogether systematically. Yet the case that he has made out for Bormann still being alive deserves the closest attention, and what he has written about other Nazi war criminals is often based on incontrovertible fact. "Aftermath" is an apt title; the terrifying ramifications of Nazism did not disappear with Hitler's death and immolation in the Berlin Bunker. ■

