

Politics, Circumstance, Intelligence, Strategy: A Review of the U.S. Race to Munich and Capture of the “Alpine Redoubt” In World War Two.

Jeffrey S. Gaab, Ph.D.¹

Abstract

The essay examines how politics, military circumstances, and intelligence all combined to effect military strategy in the last days of World War Two in Bavaria, Germany. The essay argues that the surprising and unexpected capture of the Remagen Bridge over the Rhine in March 1945 made it possible for western allied forces to address another unanticipated problem that developed in the last days of the war: the rumored move of the Nazi government south and the establishment of an “Alpine Redoubt” southeast of Munich near Salzburg. Rumors and military intelligence all suggested that Hitler might attempt to flee from the Russians surrounding Berlin and move south into an “Alpine Fortress” to command further resistance after the fall of the Nazi capital. General Eisenhower readjusted his military strategy in light of these new circumstances, abandoned any plans to head toward Berlin, and instead ordered armies south and east to stop the establishment of any new Nazi government and crush any Nazi redoubt or last desperate center of resistance.

Keywords: World War Two, Redoubt, Germany, Bavaria, Munich, Eisenhower

Introduction

In war, politics, circumstances and intelligence can combine to change entire military strategies. Well thought out plans are often altered or scrapped entirely based on new information or conditions on the ground. It can be argued that this is what occurred in the waning months of World War Two in the western theater in Europe. Original plans called for a pincer-type assault on Berlin, meeting Soviet forces in or near the German capital. Two events induced the Supreme Commander of Allied Forces, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, to alter this strategy in spring 1945. First, U.S. Forces under General Bradley unexpectedly captured the Ludendorff Bridge at Remagen intact. This hastened the Western Allied crossing of the Rhine River through central, not northern Germany and offered the possibility of cutting the Third Reich in half, north and south. The second event that caused Eisenhower’s reorientation of strategy was the emergence of intelligence reports and rumors claiming Hitler and the Nazi government would abandon Berlin at the last possible moment and move south, toward Munich or somewhere in the Alps. This essay examines how General Eisenhower, as a result of changing military circumstances and copious (though inaccurate) intelligence reports, revised original military plans and orchestrated an attack south to capture Munich and Hitler’s “Alpine Redoubt.”

¹ *Professor of History.* History, Politics, Geography Department, Farmingdale State College, State University of New York. Farmingdale New York. 11735. Tel: (631) 420-2206, Fax: (631) 420-2235; email: gaabjs@farmingdale.edu.

1. Berlin or Bust?

British and American forces established a firm base of operations in France on D-Day, 6 June 1944. Western assault forces were organized into three main battle groups. The 21st Army Group, with the US 9th Army attached under British Field Marshall Montgomery, would assault Germany through the north and head toward Berlin, meeting the Russians in or near the Nazi capital. But in March 1945 forces of General Omar Bradley's 12th Army Group under General Courtney Hodges unexpectedly captured the Ludendorff Bridge at Remagen before the Germans could destroy it. This unexpected success breached one of Germany's most daunting natural barriers: the Rhine river. German dynamite had not succeeded in destroying the bridge, and American forces were able to cross the Rhine, the last natural barrier into Germany proper, with relative ease. General Courtney Hodges reported the good news to General Bradley. "Hot dog, Courtney, . . . this will bust him wide open . . . shove everything you can across it." Within the first day, almost 8,000 men crossed the bridge, including "two armored infantry battalions, a tank battalion, a tank destroyer company, and a platoon of armored engineers of the 9th Armored Division; a regiment and two additional battalions of the 78th Division; a regiment and one additional battalion of the 9th Division; and one and a half batteries of antiaircraft artillery." (MacDonald, 1993, 219-220). This opened up a new military possibility: a "southern strategy."

However, Eisenhower's representative at General Bradley's headquarters damped the enthusiasm. "You're not going anywhere down there at Remagen- it just doesn't fit into the plan." Soon, Bradley received orders "not to push any big force" beyond the Rhine, but it was too late. When the news of the Remagen bridge capture reached Berlin, Hitler called for immediate counter measures but this too, was too late. All the Germans could muster was "a mere handful of five machines just repaired at a tank depot a hundred miles away." (Hart, 1972, 678). By 9 March the Remagen bridgehead was three miles deep. General Eisenhower recalled later that "it took the enemy a considerable time to recover from his initial surprise and confusion, and by the time he could bring up any reinforcements against our bridgehead troops we were too strong to fear defeat." (Eisenhower, 1948, 278-380). From that point forward the assault strategy for Germany, the overall plan, changed even though Eisenhower had yet to announce it: the American armies would head through central Germany, toward Leipzig and Dresden, cutting Germany in half north and south, with the Soviets taking the Nazi capital. There was to be no western drive on Berlin. (MacDonald, 1993, 398-399).

By this time the bulk of the German forces in the west had been crushed. The toughest resistance in April 1945 centered on Berlin, and the Russians already had that city surrounded. Eisenhower and planners in Washington had feared the amount of casualties an assault on Berlin might cost and were now relieved since they intended to preserve American forces for their eventual redeployment to Japan. (Davies, 2006, 127). But around the same time, in March 1945 intelligence reports about a possible Nazi last stand in south Germany began to increase. The Office for Strategic Services, America's wartime intelligence service, had warned as early as 1944 that southern Germany might represent a serious threat of Nazi resistance. If the Germans were able to establish a base of operations in the Alps, the war might be lengthened for at least six months, maybe longer, and generate serious casualties. After the surprise of the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944, when the Germans mounted a winter offensive and almost destroyed American forces in Belgium, no one wanted to take any chances with a similar episode in the Alps. Military planners knew, too, that even if the regular Wehrmacht was all but crushed, there were still Waffen-SS divisions that continued to fight tenaciously for Hitler. Munich was the last major city before the Alps and the birthplace of the National Socialist movement. Party leaders from Hitler on down often displayed "mystical adoration" for south Germany and had houses and offices in the area. Southern Germany and the Alps region, in the words of one historian, represented the "psychological locus" of the Nazis. (Minott, 1964, 17-18).

What better location from which to mount the last battle of the Third Reich? The intelligence seemed logical. Intelligence reports seemed to confirm suspicions that the Nazis were planning some form of resistance in the Alps, near Salzburg.

American Military planners expected heavy resistance around Munich, the location of the Nazi Party's national headquarters and where Hitler maintained a private residence. In April, General Bradley attached sections of the 101st Airborne Division to the U.S. Seventh Army with the objective of taking Munich, Innsbruck, and the Brenner Pass while cutting off any escape route through the Alps. "The purpose was to get American troops into the Alps before the Germans could create a redoubt there from which to continue the war. Hitler's Eagle's Nest in Berchtesgaden was the presumed HQ for this combination last stand and the beginning of a guerrilla war against the occupiers." With the memory of the Battle of the Bulge still fresh, no one doubted the Nazis' ability for surprises. "Eisenhower's biggest fear was that Hitler would get to the Eagle's Nest, where he would be well protected and have radio facilities he could use to broadcast to the German people to continue the resistance or begin guerrilla war." (Ambrose, 2001, 258-259). The flexibility in strategy the capture of the bridge at Remagen afforded, allowed Eisenhower and American military planners to divert forces for a "southern strategy" to head off any Alpine resistance the Nazis might muster.

Eisenhower recognized that changing the original strategy from a northern assault on Berlin to this eastern and southern strategy (Leipzig-Dresden) and south toward Munich and the Alps was controversial. At first, Eisenhower announced the policy in a private telegram sent only to Soviet Marshall Joseph Stalin on 28 March 1945 "without previously mentioning the subject either to his deputy, Air Chief Marshall Tedder, or the combined Chiefs of Staff." This caused a serious row with his British counterparts. Prime Minister Churchill later recalled that "The British Chiefs of Staff were concerned both about the merits of the new plan and about the short-circuiting of the highest authorities, both military and constitutional." (Churchill, 1953, 460). Eisenhower's new plans angered the British Chiefs of Staff who argued that Berlin should remain the main target of the British and American Armies. In a rare break of Allied solidarity, the British Chiefs of Staff appealed to the US Joint Chiefs of Staff to put pressure on General Eisenhower to reverse his decision. The Joint Chiefs responded that "only Eisenhower is in a position to know how to fight this battle and to exploit to the full the changing situation." (MacDonald, 1993, 342). British strategists continued to disregard the rumors of a redoubt and insisted that the American and British armies should press on toward Berlin, beating or at least meeting, the Russians. (Toland, 1965, 262; 307; Eisenhower Papers, 1970, 2557).

Eisenhower later defended his decision. "A natural objective beyond the Ruhr, was Berlin. It was politically and psychologically important as the symbol of remaining German power. I decided, however, that it was not the logical or most desirable objective for the forces of the Western Allies." First, he argued, it was clear that the Russians would reach Berlin first. Second, Eisenhower argued that striving for Berlin would weaken forces that were needed for other operations near and beyond the Ruhr. Thus, Eisenhower felt that an assault on Berlin would be "more than unwise, it was stupid." Equally important was the desirability of penetrating and destroying the so-called "National Redoubt" . . . But if the German was permitted to establish the Redoubt he might possibly force us to engage in a long-drawn-out guerrilla type of warfare, or costly siege. Thus he could keep alive his desperate hope that through disagreement among the Allies he might yet be able to secure terms more favorable than those of unconditional surrender. The way to stop this project . . . was to overrun the entire national territory [redoubt] before its organization could be effected. (Eisenhower, 1948, 397).

Politics had already determined where the western forces would stop. At Yalta in February 1945 President Roosevelt, Prime Minister Churchill, and General Secretary Stalin had already agreed to the demarcation lines in a future occupied Germany. Berlin fell within the Soviet zone of occupation. According to Eisenhower, Churchill knew too that "regardless of the distance the Allies might advance to the eastward, he [Churchill] and the President had already agreed that the British and American Occupation zones would be limited on the east by a line of two-hundred miles west of Berlin." (Eisenhower, 1948, 399). In the message to Soviet Leader Stalin on 28 March, the General promised a "secondary advance" to "effect a junction with your [USSR] forces in the Regensburg-Linz area, thereby preventing the consolidation of German resistance in a redoubt in southern Germany." (Eisenhower Papers, 1970, 2551). Eisenhower was convinced that the Nazis would take up refuge in the Alps. "The evidence was clear that the Nazi intended to make the attempt and I decided to give him no opportunity to carry it out. The way to stop this project . . . was to overrun the entire national territory before its organization could be effected." (Ambrose, 1967, 73).

Marching on Berlin would have brought the US Army well into Soviet designated territory agreed upon at the Yalta Conference. Nevertheless, staff of the US 9th Army had plans for a drive on Berlin, the goal couched in a euphemistic phrase "to enlarge the Elbe River bridgehead to include Potsdam" (the suburb just outside of Berlin). General Simpson of the 9th Army met with General Bradley, commander of the Twelfth Army Group, and together had a telephone conference with Eisenhower. Here Eisenhower categorically ruled out any drive by the US Army on Berlin. Politics and diplomacy had already settled the question of Berlin. Eisenhower knew the Russians would reach Berlin first; that Leipzig-Dresden represented the industrial heart of the Reich and needed to be crushed; and that Berlin had lost its significance as a military objective. (MacDonald, 1993, 398-399; 342-343).

2. Munich: "Capital City" and Target.

Before the Alps came Munich. If the plans for an "Alpine Redoubt" were true, then Munich, in the southeastern pocket of Germany, took on added military significance. Hitler specifically designated Munich the "Capital City of the National Socialist movement" ("*Hauptstadt der Bewegung*"), which had been founded in Munich's famous Hofbräuhaus beer hall in February 1920. Munich also served as the stage for Hitler's first grab for power, the infamous "Beer Hall Putsch," which ended in disaster in 1923. All great political movements, Hitler declared, were associated with a major city. Mussolini and the Fascists had Milan; Lenin and the Bolsheviks had Moscow. In 1934 Hitler declared that "the capital city of art and of our movement will remain Munich." Karl Fiehler, the Nazi Lord-Mayor of Munich declared on 16 March 1934 that "through Adolf Hitler and his Old Guard, Munich has become not only the birth-city, but the capital city of the movement." In a meeting with Hitler on 2 August 1935 the Lord-Mayor again raised the subject with the Führer and Hitler again gave his consent. On 6 August the Mayor of Munich proper, Karl Tempel, ordered a special meeting of the city council and announced that Hitler had declared Munich the "capital city of the movement." Tempel ordered bright signs and swastika flags for all government buildings and streets announcing Munich's new status as Germany's second capital. (Bauer, et. al., 2002, 11-12). Whether Berlin or anyone else liked it or not, Munich now stood as the capital city of the National Socialist party, and that made it a prime military target for the Allies in 1945.

The Germans too realized that Munich would be a prime target in the war and began to plan for its defense as early as 1943. The announcement of the defeat at Stalingrad on 3 February 1943 left little doubt that Germany had suffered a disastrous military defeat. For the first time, many Germans realized the war could be lost. Adolf Hitler had already given the order that there would be no surrender. It was to be total war, and there would be no negotiated settlement as there had been in 1918.

In Munich, some began to conspire against the regime to avoid the destruction of people and nation that Hitler now planned for them. These conspirators formed the *Freiheitsaktion Bayern*, the "Bavarian Freedom Movement."

The FAB began among a small group of friends. During the war, the group would get together to share news they heard over the B.B.C. and other illicit radio broadcasts from which they received uncensored reports about the military situation. (Troll, 1981, 660). One of the founding members of the FAB was Dr. Gebhard Seelos. Seelos had become disillusioned with the Nazi regime and been dismissed from the Foreign Service. Disillusionment among the population grew as Germany's military situation deteriorated. The magnitude of the German defeat at Stalingrad, where the Wehrmacht lost 250,000 soldiers and 90,000 officers by February 1943, could not be hidden. Dr. Seelos began to work with a small group of government and military personnel in Bavaria, including the mayor of Regensburg, to plan for a Bavarian "declaration of independence" from the Reich. Acting as an independent "Free State" Bavaria and Munich would surrender to the Allies without a fight, avoid the destruction and bloodshed other European cities had already experienced, and negotiate a peaceful surrender of the city. (Donohue, 1961, 206-207).

Most of the army units around Bavaria would not support their cause. One unit loyal to the revolt, the Translators Battalion led by Captain Rupprecht Gerngross, began to assemble weapons. As the plans developed, Gerngross and the others realized that they could only count on the support of the 17th Panzer Battalion and parts of the 19th and 61st Infantry regiments. They would face off against other regular army units and increasing numbers of SS troops retreating into Bavaria from other fronts. Major Alois Braun of the 17th Panzer regiment agreed to make some weapons available when the 7th US Army was near enough for action to be safely taken. Near enough meant on or over the Danube river. (Troll, 1981, 661).

If the FAB was going to act, it had to do so quickly while there was still something left to save. Major Günther Caracciola-Delbrück, another plotter, now urged his superior Franz Ritter von Epp, the Nazi Staathalter for Bavaria, to exercise his authority and declare a "state of emergency," seize political power in Bavaria from the local Nazis, and open negotiations with the Americans for a peaceful surrender of Bavaria and Munich. Epp refused and reportedly responded "How could I possibly hand myself over to a captain?" (Toland, 1965, 471). Further, von Epp feared a civil war in Bavaria and, with SS units moving toward the city, he feared for his life. Instead he proposed that Caracciola persuade Field Marshall Albert Kesselring, the supreme commander in the region, take charge of the revolt, and negotiate a cease fire with the approaching Americans.

When the Americans were close enough to the city, on 24 April, Major Braun sent two officers from Freising toward the American lines and to General Patch of US 7th Army with a promise to surrender Freising without a fight, so that the road to Munich would remain clear. Gerngross insisted the uprising would succeed only if the Americans suspended air attacks during the final preparations, and if they supported the uprising once underway. At 10:00pm that evening, the Americans sent up flares over the city of Freising: that was the prearranged sign that the officers had been received and that their offer had been accepted by the Americans. (Troll, 1981, 661).

Major Braun's regiment easily took over the radio station at Erding at 5:00am on April 28. Captain Gerngross took to the airwaves and announced the code word: "*Fasanenjagt*": Pheasant Hunt. He ordered workers to immediately defend their factories against Nazi sabotage and called on the citizens to secure work and bread for the future. However, the regiment sent to occupy the Gauleiter's offices in Munich failed to take the building.

Another group sent to arrest General Westphal, Supreme Commander of Army Group South, at his headquarters in Pullach, missed him by a few minutes. The conspirators were able to seize the offices of the *Münchener Neuester Nachrichten* newspaper, seized the Town Hall and even arrested Christian Weber, an SS Brigade Leader and one of Hitler's earliest and closest confidants. (Troll, 1981, 663-665) Initially, both the Allies and German civilians believed that the revolt had succeeded. Traditional white-and-blue Bavarian flags replaced the swastika flag over most government buildings, and civilians ran out into the streets to support the coup. Rumors abounded that Hitler was dead and that the war was finally over. (Toland, 1965, 472). The Americans could have assumed that there would be no resistance in the city, based on the radio transmissions. However, later that day Gauleiter Paul Giesler came on the same radio to claim that the "activities of the traitors" had been stopped. (Gilbert, 1995, 33).

The revolt may have succeeded if only the Americans had arrived in Munich sooner. But at the last minute the American army had been diverted from its drive on Munich to the town of Dachau and its by then infamous concentration camp. This is the first concentration camp most of the Americans had ever encountered and they liberated some 32,000 inmates. At its height, the camp held over 60,000 prisoners even though built for only 8000 – 10,000. Plans to destroy the camp before its discovery apparently failed, but a shipment of "special prisoners" which included the former chancellor of Austria, Dr. Kurt von Schnusnigg, had left the camp shortly before the Americans arrived. (Quinn, 1979, 5 – 6).

The *Freiheitsaktion Bayern* revolt fell apart as the Americans approached Munich. In reality, the coup had faltered from the start. By 9:00am the conspirators failed to capture General Westphal due to the fierce resistance of the SS, and they failed to arrest Gauleiter Paul Giesler. By 10:00am Giesler was able to broadcast that some "contemptible scoundrels belonging to a company of interpreters under the command of Captain Gerngross are trying to convey the impression that they have assumed power in Munich." Giesler promised that the conspirators would all be rounded up and by noon on 28 April broadcast that the "criminal elements under the so-called leadership of a Captain Gerngross have been rendered harmless . . . do not take this Gerngross nonsense seriously . . . not a word of it is true." He then went on to urge his fellow Münchener to resist to the last man:

But I call upon you to display your loyalty and love of our Fatherland , which you people of Munich in particular have shown to such a marked degree in the trying times of this war . . . these contemptible scoundrels who, during the hardest hour, want to besmirch the name of Germany, will soon be shot and wiped out. The people of Munich, however, will never turn against the brave soldiers who are fighting the enemy. The people of Munich will always think of the dead they have lost and will never be deflected from the loyalty to Germany and to Adolf Hitler. In this loyalty and love we abide. Long Live Germany! Long live the Führer! Heil! (Toland, 1965, 473). By 2:00pm that afternoon even Gerngross admitted that the revolt had failed and sent out word that it was now "every man for himself" to escape. (Toland, 1965, 472-474). Capturing the capital of the Nazi Party would now require a military solution: politics, negotiation, and revolution had failed.

Three divisions of the 7th US Army assaulted Munich in April 1945: The 42nd "Rainbow" division, the 45th "Thunderbirds" division and Third Infantry division. The 42nd and 45th would each occupy a quarter of the city, and the Third Infantry would occupy half the city once the fighting stopped. (Toland, 1965, 28; Sheehan, 1945, 1). The "Fighting Forty-Fifth" prepared to launch an "all-out" assault on Munich. After the liberation of Dachau, XV Corps and General Haislip raced toward Munich. If they could surround the city and seize all the bridges over the Isar River, they could catch the Germans stationed there before they fled south and east into the Alps. The 45th found only "scattered pockets of resistance" in the suburbs and "none whatsoever" in the "wrecked and blasted central part." That is, until they reached the north-east side of town. At Munich, Hitler's personal body guard detachment, the SS *Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler* put up the strongest resistance.

They fought with “snarling fury, determination, and a high degree of coordination” until they were cleared out by the 180th Infantry and forced to surrender by mid-afternoon.” Seven-hundred troops defended the SS barracks while another eight-hundred had fortified the defenses in the area. Other SS troops were stationed close by at an anti-tank school. Fighting lasted all day around the barracks on the north-east edge of the city but after several hours of fighting, sometimes even hand-to-hand combat, SS resistance collapsed by nightfall. (Bishop, et. al., 1946, 186; Rawson, 2008, 199-203). On April 30, 1945 American troops reached the center of Munich. First to the center of town was the Fighting Forty-Fifth:

The civilian population remained tight-lipped, neither outwardly hostile nor indifferent, but non-committal, going about withdrawn faces. The 45th Division headed straight for the heart of the old city, past the 15th century cathedral and the Braune House, which had been Hitler’s own. Munich, the Bavarian capital, largest city yet entered by American troops, marked the end of the fighting for the 45th Division.” (Bishop et., al., 1946, 186-187).

Then came the 42nd “Rainbow” division into the city. According to the observers, Munich was a “wild city” when the Rainbow division arrived. Looting was rampant while German soldiers looked for somewhere to surrender: Forced Laborers and Allied prisoners of war had headed for the wine cellars and food warehouses as soon as it became apparent that the German army was not going to fight in the city . . . Germans joined in their looting and soon it appeared that half the people in the city were trying to loot wine or food from some cellar or warehouse . . . roaming through the streets and sometimes marching in formation were groups of German soldiers seeking a place where they could surrender. Citizens were busy hanging white flags from their windows.

In the chaos of the Gerngross revolt, law and order had broken down and the *Wehrmacht* had failed to blow up the bridges leading into the city. “The general feeling now was that the war was over and the people of Munich were celebrating it.” (Daly, 1946, 104-106).

When the American Third Infantry Division finally reached the city to link up with the Forty-Second Rainbow division, there was no one in the city to offer surrender. Rather than a fight to the death over the “Capital City of Movement,” most of the Nazis had fled. “A strange feature of the capture of this most Nazi German city was the warm reception the United States troops received. Women threw flowers. . . Residents came running out of houses to smile and wave at the soldiers even before the shooting died down. It was the gayest welcome for United States troops since France,” the previous summer. “No officials were left to surrender Munich. They had left with troops who had escaped southeastward two days ago.” (Johnston, 1945, 7).

Even though heavily bombed, the Town Hall, Munich’s famous Rathaus, remained “virtually undamaged” and occupied as the headquarters for Military Government in the city. American forces found Hitler’s private apartment on the Prinsregentenstrasse on the east side of town but the Führer was nowhere in sight. Major General Harry Collins set up headquarters in the Rathaus in the center of the old town, while General O’Daniel tried to arrange a formal surrender of the city with the Nazi commanders. Only junior officers greeted the General, the rest of the Nazis had fled, south and east, into the Alps. (Daly, 1946, 118; Rawson, 2008, 205). The “Capital City of the Movement” capitulated almost as an afterthought. That same day, on 30 April 1945, General Dwight D. Eisenhower telegraphed the 7th Army and congratulated them on taking the city. Sent to all American, British, Canadian and French commanders: “To every member of the AEF: The whole Allied Expeditionary Force congratulates the Seventh Army on the seizure of Munich, the cradle of the Nazi beast.” (Eisenhower Papers, 1970, 2665)

3. To the Redoubt

Allied intelligence suggested that Hitler's mountain retreat, "The Berghof" in Berchtesgaden just south of Salzburg, would be the command center of fierce resistance. In the 1930s at Stangass near Berchtesgaden, the Nazis had built a complete government headquarters complex and all of the Nazi leadership built houses in the area. This served as a "summer chancellery" when Hitler stayed at the Berghof, but it could be used as a last-stand government headquarters too (Rawson, 2008, 229). American military planners knew they would have to secure these areas in order to destroy every last vestige of the Third Reich. The Alps mountain range, covered in snow and accessible by only small narrow roadways, seemed impossible for tanks and heavy armor to penetrate, in short, a perfect location from which the Nazis could launch their last fanatical resistance.

In early April 1945 General Eisenhower expressed his concerns about an Alpine resistance effort to his chiefs of staff. "Present evidence indicates that the Germans intend with every means in their power to prolong resistance to the bitter end in the most inaccessible areas of the continent which their forces now occupy. . ." especially western Austria or the "national redoubt." Eisenhower argued that VE Day should not be declared until ". . . our forces have occupied the key positions in the so-called national redoubt of western Austria, thereby preventing long drawn out operations on a considerable scale." (Eisenhower Papers, 1970, 2604).

While the 45th stayed behind in Munich, the rest of the 7th Army headed for the mountains. Intelligence reports and rumors of the "Alpine Redoubt" appeared in the press. Back in Berlin, Dr. Goebbels read these reports and, realizing their propaganda value, released even more stories of a final Alpine stand-off to the German press. Soon the rumors abounded throughout Europe that the Nazi leadership planned to move south to continue the war indefinitely. (Toland, 1965, 262). Stalin discussed the possibility of Alpine resistance with General Dean and Avril Harriman during discussions in Moscow. Stalin believed that Hitler would not surrender but continue the fight "in the mountains of Czechoslovakia and Bavaria." (Toland, 1965, 327). All available evidence indicated that the Nazis were planning a last stand in the Alps. Even in the United States, newspapers and magazines reported that the Nazis planned an Alpine Fortress to be manned by SS and Hitler Youth that would hold out for years after the formal surrender. (Kaufmann and Kaufmann, pp. 40-41).

Related to the redoubt questions was: Where was Hitler? News reports surfaced everyday claiming Hitler had already fled Berlin for refuge in the Alps. A "Vatican source" claimed that Hitler had left Berlin and sought refuge in a monastery in Salzburg. Hanson Baldwin of the *New York Times* reported that several monks had been turned out of the monastery to make room for Hitler, still recovering from head wounds from the assassination attempt of July 1944. Another *Times* correspondent, Drew Middleton, reported that the "National Redoubt" was more heavily fortified than Monte Cassino in Italy. Lack of SS resistance in the west suggested that those units had moved south to prepare for the arrival of Hitler and the last stand in the Alps. (Minott, 1964, 37; 88)

The stories in the press seemed to comport with intelligence on the ground. Army command headquarters and staff had left Berlin early in 1945 and been split between two locations: Krampnitz, near Potsdam (which later moved north to Großadmiral Donitz's headquarters at Plön near Lübeck) and Berchtesgaden in the south. In addition, most of the state ministries and government offices had fled Berlin and relocated to southern Germany at the beginning of March. Even Hitler's chief of staff in the Reich Chancellery, Hans-Heinrich Lammers, left Berlin and set up headquarters in Berchtesgaden in March. As the historian Ian Kershaw has written, by April 1945 "Berlin was now a government capital without government apparatus." (Kershaw, 2011, 339-340). Eisenhower therefore had good reason to believe that Hitler would move south to continue the war.

Eisenhower planned a two pronged assault: moving east he could crush the heavy "industrial capacity" he believed the Nazis had been building up in the Dresden-Leipzig area while also moving south to crush the "Redoubt." (Eisenhower Papers, 1970, 2560-2563).

Winston Churchill believed that Nazi heavy resistance around Lake Balaton in Hungary indicated that that the Germans seemed likely to retreat into Alps region to prolong the struggle. (Ambrose, 1967, 74). Even General Patton believed that the Nazis had built an Alpine Fortress somewhere in Austria. As late as 1 May 1945 Patton planned to cross the Inn River at Wasserburg, and slip past the 7th Army to beat them to the capture of Hitler's mountain redoubt and "pinch out the embryonic ambitions of the Seventh Army." (Patton, 1947, 320).

This intelligence was not entirely incorrect. Hermann Goring instructed Field Marshall Albert Kesselring to construct an "alpine defense system" as early as 1944, right after the successful Allied invasion on D-Day. While banning German news media from mentioning a redoubt as "defeatism," Dr. Goebbels established a special unit in the Propaganda Ministry to perpetuate stories of an "Alpine Fortress" and disseminated these stories to the foreign press. (Minott, 1964, 12; 25). Hitler had already spoken, even if too late: On 23 April he issued "Führer Order Clausewitz." With the impending division of Germany in two, and Berlin essentially cut off from communications, "Clausewitz" called for the creation of two Wehrmacht headquarters: one at Plön in the north under Großadmiral Dönitz, and the other in the south under Field Marshall Kesselring. (Bessel, 2009, 111). Two days later, on 25 April, American forces linked up with Soviet forces at Torgau, effectively dividing the Third Reich into north and south: Eisenhower's revised strategy proved a success. (MacDonald, 1993, 453). Now he could send forces south to eliminate the redoubt.

Hitler ordered the establishment of Alpine fortifications only on 26 April 1945. He commanded General Ferdinand Schöner to organize a mountain "fortress" as quickly as possible that would not be aimed at the West, but as a last "bulwark against bolshevism". He ordered that a similar "fortress" be established for the north under the command of Großadmiral Karl Donitz. (Toland, 1965, 440-441). Kaufmann and Kaufmann show that plans for an Alpine Fortress had existed since at least 1943, but that these plans were not submitted to or approved by Hitler until April 1945, when it was clearly too late. (Kaufmann and Kaufmann, 52).

When the American forces finally approached the government complex at Stangass, near Berchtesgaden, SS-*Obersturmbannführer* Bernard Frank set fire to all the buildings and evacuated with his men leaving the city undefended to the Americans. (Rawson, 2008, 229; 254). Adolf Hitler's death in Berlin on 30 April 1945 could not be officially confirmed until days and weeks after the unconditional surrender on 8 May 1945. Therefore, the idea that the Nazi leader could have escaped the Soviet encirclement of Berlin seemed a real possibility right up until the final days of the war. Großadmiral Dönitz, Hitler's appointed successor, received the news of his Fuhrer's death on the morning of 1 May 1945, the day after Hitler and his wife committed suicide in their underground bunker in Berlin. The army as well as the Germans themselves received the official announcement from Dönitz only on the evening of 1 May. However, since most people no longer had radios, newspapers, or even regular mail delivery, most Germans did not know Hitler was dead for days or weeks after the event. (Kershaw, 2011, 345-355). The remaining resistance in the south collapsed only after the official announcement of Hitler's death.

If the Nazis had truly planned for an Alpine Redoubt, Eisenhower's decision killed it " . . . so swiftly did both the XV and XXI corps advance" through the Alps that, in the words of one military historian, "Bavaria seemed to be one endless array of white flags . . ." (MacDonald, 1993, 441).

The last hold-out of the Third Reich, the armies waiting for the call to the "werewolf" action in the Alps, surrendered in the first week of May. On 4 May American forces reached Saalfelden. Army Group C, under the command of Field Marshall Albert Kesselring, and which included the German First and Nineteenth Armies, surrendered unconditionally to the 101st division and US Generals Taylor and Devers of the 7th Army on 5-6 May 1945. Innsbruck and Salzburg fell to American forces on 4 May, and the 101st Airborne division took Berchtesgaden and Hitler's mountain retreat, the Berghof on the Obersalzburg. The press reported that American troops assaulted Hitler's mountain retreat "like ants crawling over a sand pile" combing the bombed out structure for souvenirs. "Behind the empty frame, whose glass was shattered, lie the main building and all the buildings clustered around it. A thorough job of destruction was done by the Royal Air Force three weeks ago. This place is ripped and torn and the surrounding forest is splintered." (Johnston, 7 May, 11).

Breaking in to Goering's Officers Quarters and private club, soldiers found a dead German General Gustav Kastner in full dress uniform with pistol still in hand and "row after row" of liquor. (Ambrose, 1992, 271). Reportedly two-thousand German troops were taken prisoner there, including Field Marshall Ewald von Kleist. (Rawson, 2008, 231-232; Gilbert, 1995, 63; 256-257).

4. Conclusion

Politics, military circumstances on the ground, and intelligence all combined to alter strategy in the closing days of World War Two. The capture of the bridge at Remagen and the relative ease with which American forces crossed the Rhine, and the endless intelligence, rumors, and stories of an impending Nazi last stand in the Alps influenced military decisions in the west in 1945. Crossing the Rhine at Remagen had freed up western forces to make a concerted effort to secure central and southern Germany as the myth of a "redoubt" developed and ensured that the Nazi leadership could not orchestrate further resistance, or escape out of the country all together. (Minott, 1964, 137). The capture of the bridge at Remagen, and the massive amount of intelligence, and rumors about a last, all-out Nazi resistance effort near Munich in the Alps, required General Eisenhower to develop a "southern strategy," and crush any Nazi resistance in the Alpine region, especially when an assault on Berlin no longer seemed necessary. As Ambrose and other scholars have demonstrated, an assault on Berlin would not have avoided the Cold War or prevented the division of Europe. This had been decided at Yalta. (Ambrose, 1967).

After the war, General Bradley insisted that fears of an Alpine redoubt "shaped the tactical thinking of the western Allies in the closing weeks of the war in Europe." In fact, he referred to the redoubt stories as an "obsession." (Minott, 1964, xiv-xv). Later, Eisenhower admitted that he and Supreme Allied headquarters really did not know exactly what was happening in the Redoubt area. (Ambrose, 1967, 79).

That the Alpine resistance the Allies anticipated never materialized can also be seen as a result of Eisenhower's efforts. Though the "redoubt" never materialized, it could have, had the Nazi leadership acted earlier to organize such resistance. After the surprise "Battle of the Bulge" in December 1944 Eisenhower, at least, was not taking any chances. The race to capture Munich and crush the Alpine Redoubt represented General Eisenhower's determination to extinguish every last ember of the Nazi inferno, before sounding the all clear.

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