

FORENSIC IDENTIFICATION OF A DAMNED COUPLE: ADOLF HITLER AND EVA BRAUN

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Adolf Hitler (1889-1945)

Really bad teeth...

Hitler had very poor teeth and extremely bad breath (Stephenson, 2003). Before the war, he asked Blaschke, his dentist, to immobilize his teeth with a dental bridge. He wanted that bridge to be placed for several years. Thus, Blaschke made an unusual and easy-to-recognize solid metal bridge.

End of war...Beginning of the investigation...

On 30 April 1945 Hitler committed suicide. His body was then burnt in a bomb crater in the garden of the Berlin Chancellery, next to a hospital and amongst other corpses which were buried afterwards.

Despite an investigation by British officer Trevor-Roper, and despite being approached diplomatically, the Russians did not answer any questions concerning this affair until 1954. It was only that year, when Blaschke's dental mechanic who made the bridge, Fritz Echtmann, was released from prison – he had been interned in Russia for nine years - that the world learnt about the exact fate of the Führer and his wife (Lamendin, 2002). On 15 October Echtmann said he had been arrested by the Russian secret services on 9 May 1945 in his house in Berlin. In the same year, once she was released and back from Russia, Blaschke's assistant, Kätke Heusermann attested to also have been arrested on 9 May (Kirchhoff, 1987).

Post-mortem examinations

The Führer's body was only found on 3 May 1945 by Smersh agents, the Soviet Army's counter-intelligence department. On 8 May he was brought to a hospital in Berlin's suburbs to be examined. On 9 May his dentures, found on the cadaver, were shown to the assistant of Hitler's personal dentist and to the dental mechanic who had made them (Lamendin, 2002). Echtmann (Keiser-Nielsen, 1992) recalled the Soviets had shown him a lower jaw which had been cremated with two gold bridges and another one divided into nine pieces which was also in gold and which came from his jawbone. Indisputably, he remembered the work he did for Hitler. He was shown a gold-filled bridge, which was similar to that of the mandible which Eva Braun used to wear. When he was imprisoned, he submitted an additional nine-page report on the matter. At the same time the assistant identified the various elements of dental prosthesis that were being shown to her. Both of them remembered well the red box in which Hitler's remains were stored, and of the tall blond interpreter who aided discussions with the Russians. Those two statements were published, yet doubts remained. The need of an official report without flaws and coming to an indisputable and irrefutable conclusion became obvious.

First public revelations

In 1965, Yelena Rzevszkaya, the blond interpreter whom Echtmann and Heusermann mentioned, published a report entitled 'Berlin, May 1945' in a Soviet magazine. It was then published as a book and translated into numerous languages

in 1967. This work told how the Russians discovered thirteen charred corpses in the gardens of the Chancellery; and how, in the following days, they were examined by a commission of five specialists conducted by lieutenant-colonel Faust Schkarawski in the hospital of Russian field n° 496 of Berlin-Buch.

On the afternoon of 8 May the commission handed over a red box to the Smersh. It contained jawbones and gold bridges from bodies n°12 and 13 who were suspected to be Hitler's and Eva Braun's. This box was handed over to the interpreter. The following day, the Smersh looked for Hugo Blaschke, his dental prosthetist and his assistant. At the clinic of Kurfürstendamm they found out the dentist had left Berlin for Berchtesgaden under the Führer's command on 19 April. However, they succeeded in taking in the two others for questioning. They were asked about the contents of the red box which was shown to them. All that they said was immediately recorded before they had the chance to examine the human remains. On 10 May the Smersh sent a report to Moscow. It concluded the two remaining bodies had been identified as Hitler and Eva Braun's remains (Keiser-Nielsen, 1992). The red box and its content were returned to the Soviet capital.

Lew Besymenski, a Russian journalist

In 1966 Lew Besymenski, a Russian journalist and cultural attaché for West Germany, published a book entitled *Der Tod des Adolf Hitler [Adolf Hitler's death]* which was also translated into several languages, including French in 1969 by the Plon Editions. In that work, the words of Colonel Gorbushin's, the director of the Russian secret services, Col Schkarawski as well as other members of the commission in charge of the post-mortem examination of the corpses were quoted. The complete transcriptions of the examination sessions of the thirteen bodies as well as pictures of pieces of bridges were in the book. For the first time dental experts from different countries could examine the few post-mortem elements that Hitler and Eva Braun's identification had been carried out. The issue was that Besymenski's book did not give other comparative perspectives of other post-mortem elements. Indeed, the book never mentioned elements from the dictator's dental file as well as his x-rays copies. Consequently, no verification of the final results was made possible (Keiser-Nielsen, 1992).

Reidar Sognaes and his investigations

In 1971 Dr Ferdinand Strøm from Oslo asked for Prof Reidar Sognaes's help. He was the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) dental school's former dean. Strøm recalled for Sognaes that the Americans had captured Blaschke in Berchtesgaden in November 1945. Thus, there was an interrogation report in the army's archives in Washington. Given Sognaes's rank, they wondered if he might get further advice on the affair. The pre-eminent practitioner immediately went to the capital and was allowed to research in the national archives. Soon he found the American secret services' file on Blaschke's interrogation conducted in November/December 1945. The German dentist described Hitler's, Eva Braun's and Bormann's teeth. Comparing Besymenski's photographs, common features yet differences were found.

After further investigations Sognaes found five x-ray copies of Hitler's head, three dating from September 1944 and two from 21 October 1944. This set of radiographs was made because the dictator was suffering from sinus problems. Those images gave more details concerning the dental work carried out in his mouth and were

indisputable. The professor had found objective documents indisputably identifying Adolf Hitler (Benecke, 2003).

Epilogue

During the 6th meeting of the International Academy of Legal Medicine in Edinburgh, Sognaes (along with Strøm) confirmed the identification of Hitler from his teeth to a group of international experts (Keiser-Nielsen, 1992; Benecke, 2003). The two men published their results in the following article:

Sognaes R. F. & Strøm F., The odontological identification of Adolf Hitler. Definitive documentation by X-Rays, interrogation and autopsy findings, in *Acta Odontologica Scandinavica*, Feb. 1973; 31 (1): 43-69.

Fragment of Adolf Hitler's mandible (Benecke, 2003, © Benecke).



Adolf Hitler's teeth are now displayed in an unknown Ukrainian museum. Little information is given via this picture except for clearly visible periodontal disease with a loss of bony support on the left dental block, which could explain his "bad breath". On the right dental block, there is apparently a dental crown on a second lower right bicuspid.

Eva Braun (1912-1945)

Idyll with the Führer

Eva met Adolf Hitler in 1929 when she worked for the official photographer of the Nazi Party (Feral, 1998). After her two suicide attempts Hitler decided to get close to her by inviting her in his villa near Munich. By 1936 she was a part of his household at the Berghof. Eva did not attend public events with Hitler. In 1943 her sister married an SS General who was close to Heinrich Himmler. The dictator used this as an excuse to facilitate his companion's involvement in official duties. In April 1945 she went to Berlin to be by his side in the Führerbunker. Eva married Hitler on 29 April 1945 and they committed suicide together on the following day.

Doubts remain...

In Besymenski's book, which was previously mentioned, there is a picture of a bridge coming from the mouth of body n°13 which was later identified as being Eva Braun's. Blaschke's assistant and his dental mechanic had identified this prosthesis

work. Moreover, the German dentist described it in his notes handed over to the American authorities at the end of 1945. There is no formal reason to doubt those testimonies even though they were all collected in living memory and after the main characters' death. However there are no ante-mortem documents concerning Braun's mouth before her death.

Many experts considered Besymenski's picture as sufficient proof to identify body n°13. And yet, many others thought differently. On June 1981, at a meeting in Bergen, Norway, of the International Association of Forensic Sciences, a pre-eminent specialist expressed doubts concerning Eva Braun's identification (Keiser-Nielsen, 1992).

Strøm and Keiser-Nielsen wondered about the identification

Ferdinand Strøm and Søren Keiser-Nielsen immediately decided to reconsider Braun's identification (Keiser-Nielsen, 1992). They remembered that the photograph in the English edition had shown not only the bridge used as key evidence in this case, but also what was described in the Russian autopsy : "A piece of yellow metal (gold) of irregular shape measuring 6 mm x 3 mm (presumably a filling)." Apparently nobody had paid much attention to the filling so the two men decided to study it carefully and to consider it as full-fledged incriminating evidence. After a close study of the picture they were convinced it had a small cast filling, probably a gold filling. The two men could not conceive that Eva Braun would have accepted anything but the best. With the bridge beside it to allow for a comparison of size, they agreed that this was a filling from an upper bicuspid, lying on a small flat basin with its occlusal surface turned towards the camera.

One question immediately came to their mind (Benecke, 2003).

The dental prosthetist's report

With no available ante-mortem documents concerning Eva Braun's dental status, which one of the postmortem descriptions of her teeth should they rather rely on – Echtmann's, Heusermann's, or Blasckhe's? They preferred Echtmann's report. Besymenski kindly sent them a copy of the handwritten German original sketches. When he was imprisoned, the dental mechanic gave a clear description with outlines to the Soviet authorities. He described the bridge inserted in autumn 1944. He also described another bridge made for Braun's left upper jaw. The two men were immediately fascinated by this report.

His sketch of her left side sketch shows the first molar tooth missing, while the second molar has been ground into a cone. A gold crown had been cast and it carried a replacement for the missing tooth in front. It was an extension bridge with an anchor at the other end of the bridge. In Echtmann's sketch this extension bridge with its anchor is shown to the extreme left (Keiser-Nielsen, 1992). The bridge was not ready for insertion until 19 April 1945. Blaschke had to leave Berlin hastily so never had the chance to insert it. The Russians found the prosthesis on 9 May, when they searched the emergency dental clinic in the cellar of the Reich Chancellery for Blaschke's dental records (Perrier, 2000).

On the second drawing it was equally interesting to find that the upper left second bicuspid carried an inlay, on the chewing surface and the side turning towards the empty space behind (marked with arrow I). The exact Echtmann's quotation written to the right of the I. was translated : "Arrow I shows the gold filling for the bridge

which was cemented in Miss Braun at the beginning of April 1945. By Prof Blaschke, which I have made.”

Echtmann’s sketches indicated no inlays in the other three upper bicuspids. The upper bicuspid concerned was the one that could possibly be the “piece of yellow metal”. The cut-out for the anchor was the explanation of its irregular shape (Keiser-Nielsen & Strøm, 1983).

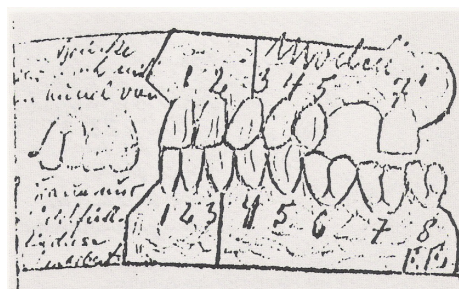
Comparative study

According to Keiser-Nielsen & Strøm, 1983:

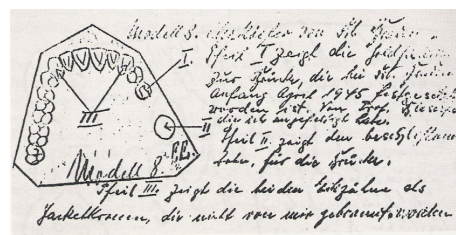
The two experts decided to assess the size of the lower jaw bridge and the gold inlay seen in the Russian photograph. They selected two natural teeth: a lower right first molar and a lower right second bicuspid. Their roots were cut off and their lingual surfaces ground away. The remaining crown parts were waxed together in a double pontic. They created an imitation in natural size of the replacement of the same two teeth in the bridge from Body No.13. Then they selected an upper left second bicuspid. They drilled in it a standard cavity for a gold inlay. The cavity filled with dark-blue wax and a cut-out for an anchor made. The wax inlay was taken out, placed beside the double pontic with its chewing surface towards the viewer. A photograph was taken in which the natural teeth of the double pontic came out the same size as the corresponding artificial teeth in the photograph of the bridge from Body No.13. The wax inlay could be compared with a reasonable degree of accuracy to the gold inlay in the Russian photograph. The wax inlay bears a more than striking resemblance to the gold inlay taken from the Body No.13. It convincingly corroborates the Russian identification of Body No.13 as Eva Braun ().

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Echtmann’s sketch of Eva Braun’s left side teeth (Keiser-Nielsen & Strøm, 1983).
To the left, the bridge that was never inserted.



Echtmann’s sketch of Eva Braun’s upper jaw (Keiser-Nielsen & Strøm, 1983).
Teeth seen towards their chewing surfaces.



Conclusions :

On 30 April 1945 Adolph Hitler and Eva Braun committed suicide. Despite the Soviet authorities, who tried to hide their death and allowed uncertainty to persist on their death, the veil was finally lifted on this mystery by two dentists; in 1973 as far as the dictator is concerned and in 1981 for his companion.

Therefore, the work accomplished by Prof Sognaes and Dr Strøm was unanimously recognized by international critics.

Who was Reidar Sognaes?

Reidar was born on 6 November 1911 in Bergen, Norway. He started the dental art at the University of Oslo before leaving for the United States in 1938, as an intern at the Forsyth Dental Infirmary for Children in Boston.

Dr Reidar F Sognaes (1911-1984) (Sognaes, 2006, © Sognaes; ABFO, 2006)



He continued his apprenticeship in the Rochester School of Medicine and the New York University College of Dentistry where he got a Master's degree in Physiology and a PhD in pathology in 1941.

In World War II Sognaes served as a Captain in the Royal Norwegian Air Force. After the conflict he taught at Harvard University. Sognaes was then in charge of the oral pathology service and hold the position of dean of the Harvard School of Dental Medicine from 1952 to 1960(ABFO, 2006).

In 1960 he went to UCLA to found a dental school of which he was the dean until he retired in 1968 (Sognaes, 2006 ; ABFO, 2006). Sognaes continued his research as professor of anatomy and oral biology and acquired international fame in terms of identification in forensic odontology.

Yet he was more famous for his observations on Georges Washington's dentures. Sognaes demonstrated that the first American president did not wear braces with wooden teeth.

He also identified Adolf Hitler's remains and those of his right-hand man, Martin Bormann, from archives gathered by the Allies.

Soon, the pre-eminent researcher focused on the pathologies of hard tissues and on calcifications in biological systems. His research allowed him to join a small circle of world specialists. He published more than 300 articles during his life. He was the first dentist to be elected a member of the National Academy of Sciences, Institute of Medicine. He was an honorary member in numerous international scientific societies and was also the chairman of the International Association for Dental Research, of

the American Institute of Oral Biology and of the International Association for Identification in Forensic Odontology.

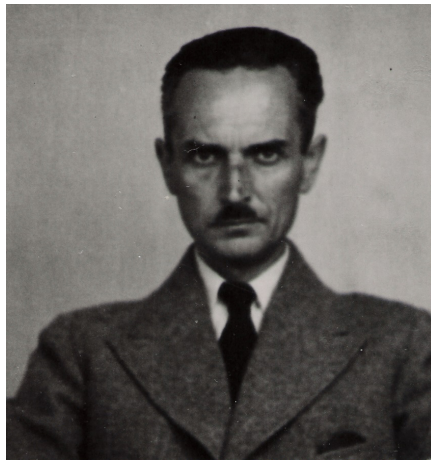
A busy man, Reidar continued to work until he died of a heart attack on 21 September 1984 (Sognaes, 2006 ; ABFO, 2006). He made his dream come true by founding the dental school in UCLA within the UCLA Health Sciences Center.

It is also essential to mention Dr Michel Perrier's research work from the Institute of legal medicine in Switzerland. He examined propaganda films from 1934 and 1944 in which Hitler was seen smiling or making a speech. His research he drew a comparison between the images revealed by the reports and the Führer's dental archives. Helped with sophisticated film equipment the analysis of those documents indisputably constituted an additional contribution to the German Chancellor's identification (Perrier, 2000).

Who was Hugo Blaschke?

Hugo Blaschke was born on 14 November 1881 in Neustadt, Prussia (Schulz, 1989). He qualified as a dentist in the USA. From August till December 1914, he served as a physician in an Artillery Regiment. Then, he practised in Francfort in 1915 and, the same year, he joined Berlin where he stayed till the end of the war. He received the War Merit Cross of 2nd class with Swords and the Honour Cross for combatants.

Prof Hugo Blaschke (1881-1953) (Bundesarchiv Berlin, 2004, © Bundesarchiv Berlin).



In 1931 Blaschke joined the National Socialist German Workers' Party as member number 452 082 and on 1 March he joined Röhm's SA. On 2 May 2 1935 Blaschke became a member of the SS led by Himmler; as a major with the number 256 882. His marriage took place on 1 July.

On 20 April 1937 Blaschke was promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel on Himmler's general staff. On 20 April 1939 he became a colonel at the SS headquarters. By 1 January 1941 he was a colonel in the Waffen-SS and was also in charge of the Health Department. On 20 April 1941 Blaschke was promoted as Colonel-in-Chief in the General SS and, more particularly, in the general staff of the General Staff service. By 30 January 1942 he was Colonel-in-Chief in the Waffen-SS at the Health Department.

On 25 June 1943 Hitler appointed Blaschke as an honorary professor. By 1 October 1944 he was a Brigadier General in the General SS. On 9 November he

was given the rank of major-general of the Waffen-SS, next to the doctor of the Reich SS and the Police.

Blaschke organised and was also in charge of all the SS and the police dental department, and was personal dentist to Hitler, Himmler, Goering, Braun and a number of other important people (Riaud, 2005).

After the war Blaschke was interned as a prisoner in Nuremberg (Schulz, 1989). He was sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment for War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity. His involvement in the exploitation of dental gold extracted from dead prisoners' mouths in concentration camps was considered indisputable.

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