



THE THIRTY
FOUR



THE KEY TO
GÖRING'S
LAST SECRET

WILLIAM HASTINGS BURKE



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'With his book the Australian William Hastings Burke has now provided [Albert Göring] with a monument.'

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'Burke splices an interesting form of history with his travel anecdotes in the background.'

Die Woche

THIRTY FOUR

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WILLIAM HASTINGS BURKE

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ONE



THE COMPASS

It's his name. That's why he is condemned to this blackest of holes. It is May 1945 — he doesn't even know the exact date — and he is a ward of the US Army at the 7th Army Interrogation Center in Augsburg, Bavaria. The complex is a converted apartment block in the suburb of Bärenkeller. It is now populated by the Allies' first haul of the Nazi elite, preparing to answer for their crimes in Nuremberg. Ten will hang in a little over a year's time.

In his makeshift cell he prepares to draft his own defence. As he rises from his bed to a writing desk set by a barred window, a crippling pain courses down his back; he suffers from a deteriorating kidney condition that goes unnoticed by his warders. His wife and baby daughter anxiously await word of him back in Salzburg, clueless as to his whereabouts or welfare.

He stands accused of complicity in the Nazi regime, an accusation of macabre irony. For this is the same regime he denounced with his whole being and one that only five months before had accused him

of subversive behaviour. He was labelled by the Gestapo a 'public enemy', a perennial thorn in their side. Jew or gentile, political or apolitical, Aryan or Slav, rich or poor, he protected them in the streets, freed them from concentration camps and ran them across borders. But his warders are blind to all of this; they only see his name.

You see, he is the younger brother of a fellow inmate in cell number five, the prize catch of them all, the former Reichsmarschall and Commander of the Luftwaffe, Hermann Göring. Albert Göring — this is the condemned man's name — reported at the end of the war to the American Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC) in Salzburg and was subsequently bundled off to this prison. Here he begins to tell his interrogators his story: a story filled with the kind of heroism, espionage and head-spinning audacity that could only be the fanciful notions of a madman. He tells them how he eschewed all the splendours of Nazi royalty — a league his name gave him instant entrée into. He alleges that he manipulated this status to attack the regime from within. He regales them with tales of near escapes from the Gestapo, of saving old Jewish ladies in the street, of money smuggling syndicates and aiding Jewish refugees ... only to be rebuffed by his interrogators. One interrogator, Major Paul Kubala, concludes: 'The results of the interrogation of Albert GOERING, brother of the REICHSMARSCHALL Herman [*sic*], constitutes as clever a piece of rationalization and 'white wash' as SAIC [Seventh Army Interrogation Center] has ever seen. Albert GOERING's lack of subtlety is matched only by the bulk of his obese brother.'¹

And so he sits in his cell with five sheets of paper and thirty-four names to convince his accusers of the unfathomable. He starts with the title *Menschen, denen ich bei eigener Gefahr (dreimal Gestapo-Haftbefehle!) Leben oder Existenz rettete* — People whose lives or existence I saved at my own peril (three Gestapo arrest warrants). He then proceeds to write, in alphabetical order, a list of thirty-four names of just a collection of the people who he rescued from Nazi persecution. He includes their titles, professions, previous addresses,

citizenships, places of last contact, current addresses, assistance provided and race. Lastly, he signs his name and hands the list to his warders; his fate now resting in their hands.

IT IS SIXTY YEARS later and I am sitting in the US National Archives in Washington DC. In my hands is the very list Albert crafted all those years ago. These five unassuming, coffee-stained pages are my first real brush with Albert Göring.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. Rewind and I'm back in my home town, Sydney, Australia, before the grand Main Quad within the University of Sydney, at my graduation ceremony. My parents are there, trying their best to operate the camera. My thesis supervisor shakes my hand, and strangers wish me luck. Where to now? they all ask. Doctor of Philosophy or finance? No, I will neither be continuing on to a PhD nor tackling the Windsor knot. Instead, I bring to light an idea that I've been toying with for some time. I tell them about a story that has plagued me ever since I chanced upon a documentary^{*} alleging that Hermann Göring — Nazism personified — had an anti-Nazi brother.

The idea that the monster we learn about in history class could have had a brother with an Oskar Schindler-type story was close to unbelievable. A quick poke around my local library, a more thorough search in the university library and the all-knowing Google, and very little came up to substantiate or repudiate the claim. There had to be more to this. Or could the heroism of one man be completely obliterated because of his brother? The name Göring started to take on so many layers that history itself seemed flawed.

A month after graduation, I booked an around-the-world ticket and left Sydney with a clear destination in mind but no certain way of reaching it. On the face of it, it looked like the proverbial backpackers'

^{*}*The Real Albert Goering*, 3BMTV, 1998.

adventure or even a boy avoiding impending adulthood. But for me, it was the beginning of a mission; a fact-finding mission to cut through the rumour and conjecture that has shrouded the truth of Albert's story.

And the mission begins here, at the US National Archives, with these five dog-eared pages resting in my hands. Sitting in this sterile reading room of tweed coats and moustaches, I try to imagine myself there with Albert, in that cell so many years ago. I want to know why he chose to document these particular names and not the hundreds of others he rescued. The Habsburg Archduke Joseph Ferdinand (number twelve) is noted, as is the ill-fated Austrian Chancellor Dr Kurt von Schuschnigg (number twenty-seven). All prominent individuals and hence people who could easily be tracked down, even today.

The list begins to read like a map, as though Albert had unwittingly condensed and plotted the entire narrative of his war years into these thirty-four names; each name a coordinate on the blueprint of his story. My boy's own adventure then crystallises into something far more serious. The paper trail and crumbling files are just that: a preserved relic. *The List of Thirty-Four* is far more than paper. It is the flesh and blood of those who stand as testament and guardian to the story of Albert Göring. It's then I realise their voices will be the compass of my journey.