

# DEATH OF RUDOLF HESS

## Extract from Time Magazine

Monday, 31 Aug 1987

Compiled by

Campbell M Gold

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The following extract, which reports Rudolf Hess' death, is taken from Time magazine, as noted.

*...Nearly every day for four decades, the prisoner took a stroll through a tiny garden inside West Berlin's forbidding Spandau fortress. He was never without a keeper and his gait had slowed to a shuffle over the years, but he rarely missed the opportunity for fresh air. Last Monday a guard left him alone briefly in a small cottage at the garden's edge. A few minutes later the guard returned to find the sole inmate of Spandau slumped over, an electrical cord wound tightly around his neck. Rushed to the nearby British Military Hospital, the old man was pronounced dead at 4:10 p.m. An autopsy showed that he had died of asphyxiation.*

*Two days later authorities revealed that a farewell note in a trouser pocket had confirmed what many had already surmised: Rudolph Hess, the last surviving member of Nazi Germany's high command, had finally escaped his captors by taking his own life at the age of 93.*

*The manner of Hess's death stirred shock and suspicion. An obvious suicide risk, Hess had tried to kill himself on at least four occasions, including a 1977 attempt in which he used a blunt dinner knife to gouge his wrists, foot and elbow. His son, Wolf Rudiger Hess, 49, a Munich civil engineer, complained about "too many mysterious circumstances" surrounding his father's death, while Alfred Seidl, the old man's lawyer, argued that it would have been physically impossible for Hess, frail and nearly blind, to have throttled himself. The suicide was a particular embarrassment to the U.S., which for 40 years had taken monthly turns guarding the prisoner with former World War II Allies Britain, France and the Soviet Union. American soldiers were responsible for minding Hess at the time of his death.*

*The controversy that followed Hess's death seemed a fitting end to his enigmatic life. As Adolf Hitler's closest friend and the former deputy to the Fuhrer of the Third Reich, Hess was sentenced to life imprisonment at the Nuremberg trials in 1946. He remained Spandau's only inhabitant for more than two decades, after the last of his fellow Nazis was released from the 147-cell red-brick fortress in 1966.*

*Only the Soviets had thought Hess was worth guarding like a latter-day Count of Monte Cristo. British, French and U.S. authorities had long been willing to release him on humanitarian grounds. Keeping the 109-year-old prison open for one inmate was also extremely costly: West Berlin and the Bonn government spent some \$1 million annually in salaries and expenses to maintain a staff of 35 wardens, cooks and maintenance men. But the Soviets*

*were adamant, insisting that, as their late leader Leonid Brezhnev put it, "to release Rudolf Hess would be an insult to the Soviet people."*

*Moscow's stubbornness was hard to fathom. Though Hess had been an early Nazi zealot, he had never wielded any real power, and he was already behind bars in England when the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union in 1941. Ironically, his friendship with Hitler had developed in jail: the two men met in Landsberg Prison after the aborted Nazi putsch in 1923. There Hitler dictated Mein Kampf to Hess. Though Hitler later made Hess his deputy, he never took him seriously or delegated authority to him. At Nuremberg, the judges found Hess not guilty of war crimes or crimes against humanity but sentenced him to life imprisonment for "crimes against peace."*

(Time Magazine, Monday, 31 Aug 1987)

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