

= Rochus Misch =

Rochus Misch (29 July 1917 ? 5 September 2013) was a German Oberscharführer (sergeant) in the 1st SS Panzer Division Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler (LSSAH) . He was badly wounded during the Polish campaign during the first month of World War II in Europe . After recovering , from 1940 to April 1945 , he served in the Führerbegleitkommando (Führer Escort Command ; FBK) as a bodyguard , courier , and telephone operator for German dictator Adolf Hitler . He was widely reported in the media as being the last surviving occupant of the Führerbunker when he died in September 2013 .

= = Early life = =

Rochus Misch was born on 29 July 1917 in Alt @-@ Schalkowitz near Oppeln (Opole) in the Province of Silesia (now Stare Sio?kowice , Poland) . His father , a construction worker , died of wounds sustained in World War I. His widowed mother died of pneumonia when he was two and a half , and he grew up with his grandparents . His older brother Bruno died after a swimming accident in May 1922 .

Over the objections of the school director , his grandfather took him out of school after eight years as he thought Rochus needed to learn a trade . After several years , Misch moved to Hoyerswerda and became an apprentice with the firm of Schmüller & Model . There he trained as a painter . In 1935 , after working as a journeyman painter , Misch attended the Masters ' School for Fine Arts in Cologne . After six months , he returned to Hoyerswerda to continue his training . Misch met Gerda , his wife @-@ to @-@ be , in July 1938 . They later married on New Year 's Eve , 1942 . They had a daughter , Brigitta Jacob @-@ Engelken who after the war supported Jewish causes .

= = Military service = =

In 1937 , Misch received a call up notice for military service . In Offenberg , he joined the SS @-@ Verfügungstruppe (SS @-@ VT) , the predecessor to the Waffen @-@ SS , instead of the German Army as the SS @-@ VT did not require Reichsarbeitsdienst (National Labour Service) time . Along with eleven others , he was selected for Hitler 's personal bodyguard unit , the Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler (LSSAH) . In August 1939 , he was promoted to the rank of SS @-@ Rottenführer .

= = = World War II = = =

For the invasion of Poland in September 1939 , his regiment was attached to the XIII Army Corps , a part of the 8th Army . Near Warsaw on 24 September , he was one of four men selected by his company commander , then SS @-@ Hauptsturmführer Wilhelm Mohnke to negotiate the surrender of Polish troops during the Battle of Modlin . He was picked because of his ability , although very limited , to speak Polish . After the negotiations failed , the Germans headed back to their lines . When they were about 80 metres from the fort , firing began . Several rounds hit Misch , who then fell down and lost consciousness . Some German soldiers carried him to an aid station . Later , he was transferred to two different hospitals . Thereafter , he spent six weeks at a convalescent home . For his actions , Misch was awarded the Iron Cross , Second Class . As Misch was the last living member of his Lower Silesian family , Mohnke recommended him for the Führerbegleitkommando (Führer Escort Command ; FBK) . This was made up of SS members , including men from the LSSAH , who no longer had to serve on the front lines .

Misch was transferred to the FBK in early May 1940 . As a junior member of Hitler 's permanent bodyguard , Misch travelled with Hitler throughout the war . When not serving as bodyguards , Misch and the others in the unit served as telephone operators , couriers , orderlies , valets , and waiters . When on duty , the FBK members were the only armed men Hitler allowed to be near him . They never had to surrender their weapon and were never searched when they were with Hitler . It did cause Misch some concern that they were armed only with Walther PPK 7 @-@ 65 pistols .

On 16 January 1945 , following the Wehrmacht 's defeat in the Battle of the Bulge , Misch and the rest of Hitler 's personal staff moved into the Führerbunker and Vorbunker under the Reich Chancellery garden in Berlin . His FBK commanding officer , Franz Schädle , appointed Misch to be the bunker telephone operator . Misch handled all of the direct communication from the bunker . He did not leave it for any significant period of time until the war ended in May 1945 . On 22 April 1945 , Schädle called him on the phone and told him there was a place reserved for his wife and young daughter on one of the last planes out of Berlin . Misch was temporarily released from duty and drove to pick up his family to take them to the aircraft . However , his wife refused to take their daughter and leave him and her parents in Berlin . Upon returning to the Reich Chancellery , Misch learned that Hitler was releasing most of the remaining staff to leave Berlin . By that date , as the Red Army was entering Berlin , propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels and his wife Magda brought their six young children to stay in the Vorbunker . Joseph Goebbels moved into the room next to Misch 's telephone exchange in the lower level of the Führerbunker . The Goebbels children would play in the corridor around Misch 's post .

On 30 April , the Soviets were less than 500 metres (1 @, @ 600 ft) from the bunker . That afternoon , Hitler and Eva Braun committed suicide fewer than 40 hours after they were married . Misch witnessed the discovery of the bodies of Hitler and Braun . He followed Otto Günsche and Hitler 's chief valet Heinz Linge to the door of Hitler 's private room . After the door was opened , Misch only took a quick " glance " . He saw Eva , with her legs drawn up , to Hitler 's left on the sofa . Her eyes were open and she was dead . Hitler was also dead . He was either sitting on the sofa or in the armchair by it ; his head " had fallen forward slightly " . Misch started to leave to report the events to Schädle , but then stopped and returned to the door of Hitler 's study . By then Misch observed that Hitler 's corpse had been removed from inside the study and wrapped in a blanket . Several men then picked it up and carried it past him . Misch left and reported the events to Schädle , who instructed him to return to his duty station . After returning to the telephone exchange , Misch later recalled Unterscharführer Retzbach proclaiming " So they 're burning the boss now ! " Retzbach asked Misch if he was going upstairs to watch the events , but Misch declined to go . Thereafter , Günsche came down and told Misch that the corpses of Hitler and Braun had been burned in the garden of the Reich Chancellery .

Misch was present in the bunker complex when Magda Goebbels poisoned her six children and then committed suicide with her husband Joseph on 1 May 1945 . According to Misch , this act by the Goebbels ' of murdering their children was most unsettling . Years later he stated that event was the " most dreadful thing " he experienced in the bunker .

Prior to his suicide , Joseph Goebbels finally released Misch from further service ; he was free to leave . Misch and mechanic Johannes Hentschel were two of the last people remaining in the bunker . They exchanged letters to their wives in case anything happened to either of them . Misch then went upstairs through the cellars of the Reich Chancellery to where Schädle had his office to report one last time . According to Hentschel , by that time Schädle 's shrapnel leg wound had turned gangrenous . Misch told Schädle that Goebbels had released him . Schädle told Misch of the route he should take to try to get through the Soviet encirclement of the area . After helping Misch , Schädle shot himself . Misch fled the bunker in the early morning of 2 May , only hours before the Red Army seized it . He met up with some other soldiers and they travelled north through the U @- @ Bahn tunnels . However , they were captured shortly thereafter and taken prisoner . Misch was brought to Lubyanka Prison in Moscow , where he was tortured by Soviet NKVD officers in an attempt to extract information regarding Hitler 's last days . Soviet leader Joseph Stalin was extremely interested in learning of Hitler 's fate and theories about possible escape . Misch spent eight years in Soviet forced labour camps .

= = Later life = =

After his release from captivity in 1953 , Misch returned to what was then West Berlin . He arrived home on New Year 's Eve 1953 to the house which was 3 @. @ 2 kilometres (2 @. @ 0 mi) from the Führerbunker . At the time , Misch 's wife worked as a teacher in Neukölln . Misch struggled for

several years with what to do with his life after captivity . He was offered various odd jobs , among others as a porter in a hospital and as a driver . Most of these job offers were through his wartime contacts , and required moving away from Berlin , which his wife refused to do . He finally obtained a loan backed by wealthy German philanthropists to buy out a painting and interior decorating shop from a retiree in Berlin . He ran this modest business successfully , and during the early Allied occupation of Berlin also became involved in the making of peanut butter for American troops . The business had been started by Misch 's old friend , Adolf Kleinholdermann . This sideline business became so successful that Misch considered leaving his shop . His wife convinced him to remain in the painting and interior decorating business . In 1975 , Gerda was elected to the parliament of West Berlin in which she served for several years . Years later Gerda developed Alzheimer 's and died in 1998 . Misch continued to manage his shop until his retirement at age 68 in 1985 . His memoir in German , *Der letzte Zeuge* (*The Last Witness*) , was published in 2008 . The English edition was published in 2014 with an introduction by historian Roger Moorhouse .

With the deaths of Bernd von Freytag @-@ Loringhoven on 27 February 2007 , Armin Lehmann on 10 October 2008 , and Siegfried Knappe on 1 December 2008 , Misch was said to be the last survivor of the Führerbunker . Misch was loyal to Hitler to the end , stating in Nazi apologia , " He was no brute . He was no monster . He was no superman " , " ... very normal . Not like what is written " , and " [h] e was a wonderful boss " . Misch 's daughter , Brigitta , learned through her maternal grandmother that Gerda was of Jewish descent . However , Gerda never mentioned it and her father refused to acknowledge it . Brigitta became an architect and has supported Jewish causes .

After the release of the 2004 German film *Downfall* (*Der Untergang*) in France , French journalist Nicolas Bourcier interviewed Misch on multiple occasions during 2005 . The resulting biography was published in French as *J'étais garde du corps d 'Hitler 1940 ? 1945* (*I was Hitler 's bodyguard 1940 ? 1945*) in March 2006 , ISBN 2253121541 . Translations were released in South America , Japan , Spain , Poland , Turkey , and Germany in 2006 and 2007 . Misch served as consultant to writer Christopher McQuarrie on the 2008 film *Valkyrie* , a Hollywood depiction of the 20 July plot .

Misch lived in Berlin in the same house he moved into when he was released by the Soviets . The house is in the district of Rudow in South Berlin . Misch regularly received visitors who wished to speak to or interview him . Misch died in Berlin on 5 September 2013 at the age of 96 .

= = Books = =

J'étais garde du corps d 'Hitler 1940 ? 1945 (*I was Hitler 's bodyguard 1940 ? 1945*) , with Nicolas Bourcier . Le Cherche Midi 2006 , ISBN 978 @-@ 2749105055 .

Rochus Misch : *Der letzte Zeuge . Ich war Hitlers Telefonist , Kurier und Leibwächter* . Mit einem Vorwort von Ralph Giordano . 11 . Auflage , Piper @-@ Verlag 2013 , ISBN 978 @-@ 3 @-@ 492 @-@ 25735 @-@ 0 .

Hitler 's Last Witness : The Memoirs of Hitler 's Bodyguard . Frontline Books 2014 , ISBN 978 @-@ 1848327498 .