

= Salon Kitty =

Salon Kitty was a high @-@ class Berlin brothel used by the Nazi intelligence service , the Sicherheitsdienst ( SD ) , for espionage purposes during World War II .

Created in the early 1930s , the salon was taken over by SS general Reinhard Heydrich and his subordinate Walter Schellenberg in 1939 . The brothel was managed by Kitty Schmidt throughout its entire existence who was the original owner . The plan was to seduce top German dignitaries , foreign visitors as well as diplomats with alcohol and women so they would disclose secrets or express their honest opinions on Nazi @-@ related topics and individuals . Notable guests included Heydrich himself , Joseph Dietrich , Galeazzo Ciano and Joseph Goebbels . The building housing the salon was destroyed in an air raid in 1942 and the project quickly lost its importance . Salon Kitty has been the inspiration or subject to many brothels featured in films involving Nazi espionage .

= = History = =

In the 1930s , " Salon Kitty " was a high @-@ class brothel located at 11 Giesebrechtstrasse in Charlottenburg , a wealthy district of Berlin . Its usual clientele included German dignitaries , foreign diplomats , top industrialist , high @-@ ranking civil servants and senior Nazi Party members . Its madame was Katharina Zammit , better known as Kitty Schmidt , who had been running the brothel since its creation .

= = = Nazi takeover = = =

Schmidt had secretly been sending money to British banks with fleeing refugees ever since the Nazis took power in Germany in January 1933 . When she eventually tried to leave the country on 28 June 1939 , Sicherheitsdienst ( SD ) agents arrested her at the Dutch border and took her to Gestapo headquarters . Once there she was seen by Walter Schellenberg , who at that time worked in the counter @-@ intelligence department of the SD . He gave her an ultimatum : cooperate with the Nazis or be sent to a concentration camp .

The idea to use Salon Kitty for espionage purposes came from Reinhard Heydrich , a leading SS general and police chief within Nazi Germany . Instead of infiltrating the brothel , Schellenberg decided to take it over altogether . He converted the basement into a " workshop " where five operators could make transcriptions of conversations from the love @-@ making room . The nine rooms of the salon were also lavishly expanded and renovated to the highest standards of the 1930s . The idea was to entertain prominent guests with wine and women , so they would disclose secrets or talk about their real opinions to ensure their support could be relied upon .

= = = Girls of Salon Kitty = = =

For the purpose of espionage , the SS started looking for young women to work in the brothel . In a circular deemed " top secret " , Schellenberg asked administrative offices in Berlin for assistance . The requirement profile read : " Wanted are women and girls , who are intelligent , multilingual , nationalistically minded and furthermore man @-@ crazy " ( Gesucht werden Frauen und Mädchen , die intelligent , mehrsprachig , nationalistisch gesinnt und ferner mannstoll sind . ) . Berlin 's Sittenpolizei ( " vice squad " ) arrested dozens of Berlin prostitutes and selected the most beautiful and sexually attractive as potential agents to work at Salon Kitty . Among other things , they were trained to recognize military uniforms , and to glean secrets from innocuous conversation . They were not told about the microphones , but had to make a report after every encounter . The ladies all had their particular attractions and had been trained to satisfy even the discerning customers . Historian Paul Roland further notes that the women who entertained members of the Nazi elite , however , were respected ladies of Berlin 's high society who were given no allowances for their " contributions " and were nearly all married to men of good financial means .

In March 1940 , Schmidt was told to continue business as if nothing had happened , except now

she had a special book of twenty additional girls she should only show to certain clients . If a customer used the phrase " I come from Rothenburg " , she was instructed to show him the book , allow him make his decision and call for the girl he had selected . The girl would then spend the night with the guest and depart later .

== = Notable guests == =

Salon Kitty became even more popular when selected guests in the military and diplomatic corps were told the " secret codeword " and monitors made thousands of recordings during their visits . One of the customers was Galeazzo Ciano , son @-@ in @-@ law of Italian dictator Benito Mussolini and Foreign Minister of Fascist Italy , whose forthright opinions about the Führer were not particularly positive . Another visitor , SS general Sepp Dietrich , wanted all the 20 special girls for an all @-@ night orgy , but he revealed no secrets . Additionally , propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels has been marked as a client ; he enjoyed " lesbian displays " that were otherwise considered anti @-@ social acts outside of that context . Heydrich also made a number of " inspection tours " , although the microphones were turned off on those occasions .

British agent Roger Wilson , under his cover identity as Romanian press secretary " Ljubo Kolchev " , noticed the microphone wires while there . He became a regular customer of the salon with a regular girl , and later arranged a wiretap to three cables . Now British intelligence heard some of the same conversations as the SD did .

== = Air raid and closing == =

As the war progressed , the clientele of Salon Kitty decreased . In July 1942 , the building was demolished during an air attack and the brothel had to be relocated . Within the year the SD decided to abandon the project and handed the salon back to Schmidt , with the threat that she would keep silent or face retaliation .

Madame Schmidt did not talk about the matter even after the war . She died in 1954 at the age of 71 without revealing the identity of any of her former employees . Total number of Gestapo recordings from the brothel was estimated by the Stasi ( East German Security Service ) to be about 25 @, @ 000 . Virtually all of the recordings have since been lost or destroyed due to their post @-@ war unimportance . According to a 2005 article in Die Tageszeitung , the brothel continued to exist after World War II under the management of Schmidt 's son and daughter . In the 1990s , it was turned into a home for asylum @-@ seekers , which was closed soon after because of local protest against the residents .

== = Media == =

The story of what happened at SalonKitty first came to light in Walter Schellenberg 's memoirs , published in Germany in 1956 under the title The Labyrinth . Peter Norden later expanded the story in his 1970 book Salon Kitty . This book became the basis for the highly controversial 1976 film Salon Kitty , directed by Tinto Brass and starring Helmut Berger as Walter Schellenberg ( renamed Helmut Wallenberg ) and Ingrid Thulin as Kitty Schmidt ( renamed Kitty Kellermann ) .

The 1981 BBC comedy drama Private Schulz , about a German fraudster and petty criminal 's unwilling World War II service in the SS , prominently features the salon . In the first episode , Schultz has been given the job of manning a listening post in the brothel 's basement and recording the conversations picked up by the hidden microphones .

The concept of the Gestapo using a brothel full of spies to find traitors within the Nazi regime has been recycled several times in various European nazi exploitation films .

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