

Nuclear Weapons and the Third Reich: Hitler's Military Advisor Colonel Skorzeny called for the Bombing of New York City

Hitler Compared Nuclear Bombs to the Meteor Explosions Over Arizona and Siberia

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Region: [Europe](#)

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Author's preface:

*About 18 months ago the distinguished American historian and scientist, **Noam Chomsky**, directed my attention through emails to Otto Skorzeny's 'My Commando Operations', [a book on which](#) the below article is largely based upon - and, a little later, Chomsky specifically pointed this author towards the material featured in Chapter 12 of Skorzeny's book, 'Why Hitler didn't build the atomic bomb'.*

Seventy-five years ago, on 22 October 1944, SS lieutenant-colonel **Otto Skorzeny** was summoned once more to the Wolf's Lair headquarters in East Prussia, **Adolf Hitler's** secret compound buried deep in the Masurian woodlands.

Skorzeny's presence at the Wolf's Lair was requested by Hitler in order to discuss assignments for the Ardennes Offensive, which was designed to cut the Allied armies in two, and force them to negotiate a peace treaty in the Nazis' favour. This was not an entirely impossible hope, considering the poor performance and sluggish advances made by American and British divisions in France, against the outnumbered Germans.

Contrary to myth, on those occasions that Allied soldiers met German forces on a level playing field, the outcome was not in doubt. The English historian Max Hastings noted of the Germans,

"Their tactics were masterly... Their junior leadership was much superior to that of the Americans, perhaps also to that of the British. Throughout the Second World War, wherever British or American troops met the Germans in anything like equal strength, the Germans prevailed".

Hastings' observations [are supported by](#) other scholars, and even by political figures like Winston Churchill, who wrote that,

"The superiority of the Germans in design, management and energy were plain... At Narvik a mixed and improvised German force, barely 6,000 strong, held at bay for six weeks some 20,000 Allied troops... some of our finest

troops, the Scots and Irish Guards, were baffled by the vigour, enterprise and training of Hitler's young men".



The 6 feet 4 inch Skorzeny was among the most heavily decorated of Nazi Germany's soldiers. Allied leadership and Western media were labelling this scarred commando as "the most dangerous man in Europe". Come the autumn of 1944, Skorzeny's reputation had reached legendary status within the Third Reich itself, and by this date he had become perhaps Hitler's favourite soldier.

It is no exaggeration to note that Skorzeny's operations had a direct impact upon the Second World War. His leading of the 1943 mission - to secure **Benito Mussolini** from a mountain top prison in central Italy - allowed a Nazi puppet government, led ostensibly by Il Duce, to remain firmly on Italian soil until almost the end of the war in Europe.

Mussolini's rescuing was a factor in preventing a fascist collapse in Italy; but the Nazi cause was aided yet again, it must be said, by the underwhelming display of Allied soldiers on this separate front - though the Germans were assisted in their skilful defensive manoeuvres in Italy, by the particularly mountainous and muddy terrain of that country.

The significance of Mussolini's safeguarding from Allied hands was a major propaganda coup for the Nazis. Having been informed immediately of the news at the Wolf's Lair on 12 September 1943, an overjoyed Hitler rang Skorzeny at the Hotel Imperial in Vienna, where the latter had just arrived and said to him,

"Today, you have carried out a mission that will go down in history. You have given me back my old friend Mussolini. I have awarded you the Knight's Cross and promoted you to Sturmbannführer. Heartiest congratulations!"

Skorzeny then passed the telephone to Mussolini so that he could speak to Hitler. Mussolini thanked sincerely his German counterpart, telling Hitler that he was feeling exhausted and needed to go to bed right away "for a long sleep".

Later that evening, Skorzeny also [received phone calls](#) from the notorious Heinrich Himmler and Hermann Goering - while even Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel dusted off his old monocle to ring him.

Skorzeny again performed a central role in influencing the fighting in World War II when, on the 15th and 16th of October 1944, he engineered the operation to institute an ardent pro-

Nazi cabinet in Hungary, the Arrow Cross Party. As a consequence, the Hungarians continued fighting desperately alongside the Germans, enjoying local victories against the Red Army, and holding up their advance westwards. The Arrow Cross Party, with Nazi assistance, subsequently hunted down much of Hungary's remaining Jewish population, sending them on death marches and off to concentration camps; an all too familiar scene witnessed in Europe over preceding years.

By 1944, rumours were rife among German soldiers that gravity-defying secret weapons were undergoing production by Nazi scientists, that would come to their ultimate rescue; and somehow grant a disintegrating Third Reich the most unlikely of victories.

In the war's final months, Hitler retained a fervent wish to wipe from the planet's surface not only Moscow and London with unheralded weapons, but also to bring ruin upon New York City. As we know from his diatribes, Hitler desired to exact vengeance on the Western powers for their systematic destruction of German cities.

He had form in this regard. During early September 1941, Hitler issued orders to German generals of his decision "to erase the city of Petersburg from the face of the earth. There is no reason for the future existence of this large town". From September 1941, enormous German railway guns were lining up outside Petersburg (Leningrad), whose 30 inch shells could reach every street and district of the city. By January 1944 Leningrad was still just about standing, as hundreds of thousands of her residents lay dead.

In mid-August 1944, with Allied soldiers at last approaching Paris's outskirts, Hitler ordered that the city be razed to the ground, screaming into the telephone "Is Paris burning?" Fortunately, these half-crazed demands were ignored by General Dietrich von Choltitz, Nazi Germany's military governor of Paris. The French capital continued existing in all of its glory.

Meanwhile, London was experiencing a new terror as, from 13 June 1944, unmanned Nazi V-1 cruise missiles were careering across the sky and down upon that vast metropolis. The United States was soon to be targeted too, it was hoped. English author Geoffrey Michael Brooks outlined that,

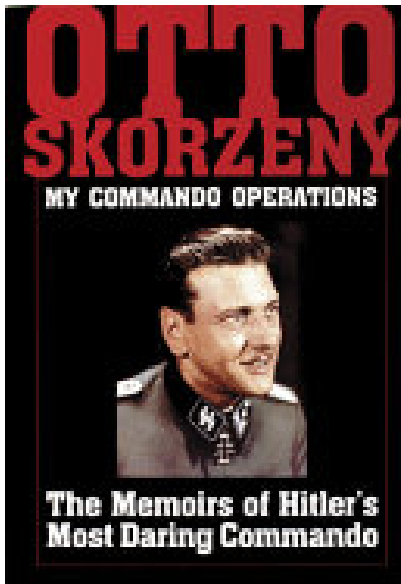
"Hauptsturmführer Otto Skorzeny argued energetically for the immediate implementation of the V-1 project against New York".

During a meeting in November 1944 with Himmler and other Nazi dignitaries at Hohenlychen Sanatorium (Himmler's new headquarters), Skorzeny mentioned the possibility too of equipping U-boats lurking off America's eastern coastline with V-1 missiles - that could then be fired unmolested at New York City, from launching ramps attached to German submarines. Skorzeny was told of such a possibility by **Admiral Hellmuth Heye**, who had formed an opinion that the plan was feasible.

On hearing this revelation Himmler, convulsed with excitement, "leapt from his armchair and ran to the map which covered a large part of the wall", before crying out,

"Then we must bombard New York! Lay it in ruins! The Americans will also get a taste of the war. We must inform the Führer at once and telephone the Grand Admiral [Karl Dönitz]... I am convinced that the Americans could not bear being attacked in their own country. Their fighting morale would sink to zero".

The American mainland had not undergone attack by a foreign power for [well over a century](#), since the War of 1812 against the British Empire. It was felt that the spectacle of German missiles, smashing into New York's shining spires and skyscrapers, could inflict severe psychological damage upon the Americans. It would no doubt have come as a real shock to the world, had the United States' landmark city been attacked by revolutionary German weaponry, which the Americans themselves did not possess - and it may have given the Roosevelt administration food for thought. Yet it is not realistic to suggest that such actions as striking New York could have altered the course of the war.



Even so, Skorzeny [wrote that](#),

“Included in the V-weapons program was the construction of a rocket capable of bombarding New York or Moscow [from Germany]. This rocket was practically finished at the end of March 1945, and could have gone into series production in the beginning of July”.

The speculation surrounding Nazi wonder weapons was being disseminated far and wide by Joseph Goebbels' propaganda ministry. Many among the Germans believed what they heard, perhaps out of desperation or with some reason, as ingenious rocket engineers - like Wernher von Braun and Arthur Rudolph - were at the time producing miracles with their discoveries.

However, dialogue among the Germans had largely centred on a different, more sinister implement. Skorzeny remembers that “most talk was about another terrible weapon that was supposed to be based on artificially produced radioactivity. Without being an atomic physicist, I knew that it was possible to make an explosive device using the fission energy of uranium. The English sabotage mission against the heavy water factory in Norway at the beginning of 1943 drew my attention, as did the bombing raid which followed the next autumn, which damaged the plant heavily”.

Groundbreaking news regarding unusually powerful bombs was even enjoying exposure in the Nazi press. During the first hours of August 1944 the German agency, TranSozean Innendienst, [relayed a report that](#),

“In the United States, scientific experiments are being carried out on a new bomb. Its explosive substance is uranium, and when the elements within its structure are liberated, a force of hitherto undreamed-of violence is generated”.



This disclosure we can assume spread among the SS and Wehrmacht hierarchy, quickly reaching Hitler’s ears. This leak was also known in America and caused much embarrassment to those like **Major General Leslie Groves**, who was directing America’s nuclear program, the Manhattan Project.

Hardly by coincidence, a few days after the German newspaper account Hitler had “enlarged upon his fears” regarding “this new explosive” with the Romanian dictator Ion Antonescu at the Wolf’s Lair (on 5 August 1944).

Hitler’s knowledge of the potential of atomic weapons is very likely to have predated August 1944. Skorzeny writes that in the autumn of 1940 Hitler had “a long discussion on the subject” of nuclear fission with Fritz Todt, the German armaments minister. Following his meeting with Todt, the Nazi leader “thought that the use of atomic energy for military purposes would mean the end of humanity”.

Skorzeny claims that Hitler read a lengthy paper on nuclear fission produced in 1942 by **Werner Heisenberg**, Germany’s Nobel Prize winning theoretical physicist. Furthermore, in late February 1942 Heisenberg conducted a lecture in front of Third Reich government officials at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Physics in Berlin. The subject matter included the awesome potential of nuclear fission, and at this lecture he spoke in layman’s language that any ordinary citizen could grasp. Among [what Heisenberg said was](#), “Pure uranium-235 is thus seen to be an explosive of quite unimaginable force”. U-235 is one of the common isotopes used in nuclear weapons production.

Heisenberg’s comments were most probably relayed to Hitler in some form. Among those in attendance at the Heisenberg lecture was **Bernhard Rust**, an incorrigible Nazi and the Reich minister “for science, education and national culture”. Rust was well known to Hitler for many years, and his membership of the Nazi Party dated as far back as 1922. Hitler was acquainted with Heisenberg too, and the dictator had repeatedly met other eminent scientists like Nobel Prize winners Philipp Lenard and Max Planck, while he also had discussions on rocket technology with Von Braun, such as in early 1943.

Skorzeny recalls, “As well I might describe a personal experience”, which comprises his meeting with Hitler of 22 October 1944. He recounts that [Hitler said to him](#),

“Even if the radioactivity were controlled and then nuclear fission used as a weapon, the effects would still be horrible. When Dr. Todt was with me, I read that such a device with controlled radioactivity would release energy that would leave behind devastation which could only be compared with the meteors that fell in Arizona and near Lake Baikal in Siberia... That would be the Apocalypse”.

On the morning of 30 June 1908, an asteroid hundreds of feet in diameter blew up in mid-air about 600 miles north-west of Lake Baikal. Its explosive impact is often estimated to have been the equivalent of 10 to 15 megatons of force, making it possibly 1,000 times more powerful than the Hiroshima atomic bomb. This Siberian asteroid, known as the “Tunguska event”, flattened an area of around 2,000 square kilometres. Today, New York and its boroughs consist of less than 800 square kilometres, meaning that New York would have been annihilated more than twice over by this asteroid.

Nearly 50,000 years ago, a meteor slammed into the northern Arizona desert, leaving behind a crater more than one kilometre wide and just shy of 600 feet deep. This meteor impact zone remains almost perfectly preserved to current times, and is visible from space. It seems plausible that these events can only be compared to a nuclear conflict.

Such is the nature of an all-powerful dictatorship like Hitler’s, that information resembling anything of importance, sometimes even trivial details, are very often forwarded to the autocrat in charge. Those working under the dictator fear, quite reasonably, that their failure to pass on vital material may rebound upon them through severe retribution, should their silence or withholding of information be discovered. There may also be the need to score points and win Hitler’s personal favour, which was greatly sought after.

This is not the case in a democracy to the same degree, where occasionally the most critical developments have been concealed from the president, such as in America. Harry Truman was unaware of the possibility of our earth’s atmosphere igniting, following the fateful atomic test of 16 July 1945. Enrico Fermi, America’s chief nuclear physicist, [estimated a 10% chance](#) that the earth would be destroyed after the atomic blast. Fermi was not joking as is sometimes thought, and he feared that the intense heat released from the bomb could cause ignition with our planet’s elements, spreading globally and wiping out everything.

This was all kept secret from the blissfully unaware president Truman, who was present in Germany at the time for the Potsdam Conference, and impatiently awaiting news of what he hoped would be a successful atomic test. Scientists working on the US nuclear program, and also military personnel like Major General Groves, had kept their fears secret from Truman relating to the detonation.

In a democracy those working in the background can obscure details from their leader, knowing that they could never be put to death for their misdemeanours, or even endure imprisonment and scrutiny. Moreover, before long a president is either voted out of office, or departs at the end of his or her tenure. A dictatorship lasts indefinitely, and this ever-lasting spectre induces further psychological effects.

As Albert Speer notes in his postwar writings, Hitler was made aware in June 1942 of the

possibility of an uncontrollable chain reaction occurring following an atomic blast. Heisenberg also informed Speer, who subsequently told Hitler, that the German scientist was [unable to rule out](#) with complete certainty the feared chain reaction, in the aftermath of exploding such a device.

Hitler was “plainly not delighted” with the risks involved in taking that hazardous route, and the Nazi A-bomb program was disbanded forever in the autumn of 1942, as Speer revealed. The chance of it ever succeeding was highly unlikely anyway, due to enemy bombing raids, lack of funding and time constraints.

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