

THE ARREST OF THE GERMAN GOVERNMENT MAY 1945
(L. Hugh Williams TD)

I was one of four officers from HQ Second Army detailed to arrest senior members of the German Government. After the death of Hitler, his successor Gross Admiral Karl Donitz set up a form of Government in the Baltic town of Flensburg. On 4th May he sent Admiral Hans von Friedeburg with two other officers to HQ Second Army in Luneburg. They offered the surrender of all German troops facing the British and Americans and in fact a document was signed to this effect. However the point was made that a complete surrender was required. Von Friedeburg and his party then went to Rheims to negotiate with Eisenhower. In the end General Oberst Jodl came from Flensburg and on the 8th May unconditional surrender was signed and the war ended. The Allies set up a commission under General Rooke to oversee the transfer of government. The Allied Commission went to Flensburg but because all buildings were occupied by the Germans they set up office in an old merchant ship called The Patria.

On the morning of 23rd May General Rooke summoned Donitz, Jodl, and Von Friedeburg to appear before the commission. They were informed there would be no discussion, their Government was at an end and they must offer themselves for arrest. On a cold morning we stood on the dockside. There were armed Germans all around. As the three left the ship we intended to intercept them. However in the confusion we failed to intercept and the three got into three cars and drove furiously away. We followed in our three vehicles rather in the manner of Keystone Cops. Derek followed Donitz, Philip followed Jodl, Gilbert and I stayed in the staff car. We discovered that Von Friedeburg had gone to his bathroom and taken cyanide and died. 159 Brigade had taken over the Police Headquarters and one by one the prisoners assembled there. There were 18 officials one staff officer, a cabin boy and a batman. In turn they were searched for drugs, poison etc by a team from Field Security. I was approached by the leader of the team. He held the Donitz baton. He felt that it might be hollow and could contain something inside. I unscrewed the end. There was nothing there. I said "I will keep the baton". Tony Solomon the Bde IO asked what was I going to do with it. We decided to give it to the Brigadier.

Many years later, when in Shrewsbury, I visited the museum and there in a glass case was my baton. The inscription read "Captured by troops of the 1st Hereford Regiment." I said to the curator "That's not true, I stole the baton and then gave it to Brigadier Churcher." Of course Churcher at one time was CO of the Herefords and no doubt that's how the inscription was obtained.

The members of the Press were seeking an interview with some of our prisoners. In the end Brigade agreed and Donitz, Jodl, and Speer were taken to a courtyard at the rear of the HQ. There one journalist who could speak German was allowed to address the three. Both Donitz and Speer ignored him but Jodl said in German "I am only required to give my name rank and number." Quickly the journalist, "Was ist Ihr Name?" etc Jodl replied Mein Name ist Alfred Jodl General Oberst followed by a number He then broke into a torrent of abuse. We took them back inside.

When Field Security had completed the search, we were informed that two trucks were outside to take us to the airfield. We ushered the 21 into the first of the trucks, Gilbert told Derek and me to accompany them to the airfield. There a DC3 Dakota awaited us. The Germans entered the plane. There were two side benches. Donitz occupied the foremost seat on the port side, Derek and I had the rear positions on the starboard side. We had a little trouble with the American crew who wanted to get autographs. We took off. After a while the little man seated opposite me, arose, raised his Homberg hat and said "Where are we going?" "Not to be outdone I got up bowed and said "I'm afraid I can't tell you". "Ah" he said "It is a secret". "Yes" I said. As far as I was concerned it was a secret because no one had told us where we were going. Later we landed at Luneberg. Perhaps the crew didn't know and were asking directions. We permitted our guests to leave the plane and stretch their legs. Some relieved themselves on the lush green turf of Luneberg. What that did to the grass I shall never know.

The crew returned and we boarded the plane again. Before we left Flensburg the QM of 159 Brigade had pushed on board two wooden crates, one containing tins of corned beef and the other tins of biscuits. At this stage my little friend rose again and we went through the bowing and hat raising, Morecambe and wise had nothing on us. He said "Is this for us". "Yes" I replied. Now one of the failings of German Government was that they had never taught their politicians and senior Wehrmacht officers how to open tins of bully beef. Standing in the middle of the plane at 200 knots, I demonstrated how to open a tin of corned beef. Back at Luneburg I wrote this down as a form of weapon training manual. "'Olding the can in the left 'and little finger along the word Libby's". and so on. I used to perform this with great success at Mess parties. Donitz said his wife had put some sausage in his brief case could he have a knife. So I searched through my haversack and found my knife. I helped the little cabin boy with his. I wound the base off, held the tin over his lap, hit the bottom and the contents dropped into his hands.

We landed at Mondorf in Luxemburg. We left the plane and boarded another lorry. At the camp we were met by a very tall American colonel, who wore two pearl handled pistols dangling from his hips. Here the scenario changed. Whereas we had treated the Germans with a sort of arms length courtesy, the Americans had no such truck. Our prisoners were surrounded by six huge sergeants, all carrying machine guns, and they marched them off. The colonel took us up to his quarters where we were joined by Gilbert and Philip. On the way we passed a verandah where I saw Herman Goring, Ley, and streicher among a number of familiar faces. We spent the night there and in the morning we waited for a plane to take us back to Luneburg.



Hugh Williams: took Gross Admiral Dönitz's baton

A part in the final act

ON May 8, 1945, I was at the 2nd Army HQ on Luneburg Heath, a Captain on intelligence duties — but I took part in the events which marked the final collapse of the Nazi regime two weeks later.

On May 4 we had received Admiral Hans von Friedeburg who signed a document surrendering all troops opposing 21st Army Group. I have a copy of that document, countersigned by Field Marshal Montgomery.

But following this, I was one of four British officers detailed to arrange the final arrest on May 23 of senior German government officials still at liberty in Flensburg on the Baltic coast.

There were 60,000 armed Germans in the enclave. We turned up in a couple of Jeeps — and pursued a convoy of German cars as they

tried to get back to their HQ in Glücksburg castle. It was all very friendly when they surrendered. They said little, but Admiral Friedeburg went to his bathroom and took cyanide. Among our charges were Gross Admiral Dönitz, General Jodl and Reichminister Albert Speer.

After the arrest, I and one other officer, Captain Derek Knee, escorted 21 members of the rump government by air from Flensburg to Luxembourg. The American aircrew wanted their autographs.

A little German in a Hamburg hat asked "where are we going?" I did not reply. "Ah ja, secret," he said. I took Admiral Dönitz's baton on the excuse he did not need it any more. It's now in the regimental museum.

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DEREK
HUGH WILLIAMS



JOAL

SPEER