

75 Years ago: ' Mich schmerzt das rechte Ohr... '

[75 Years ago, Hitler said: 'I have pain in my right ear...']
About the ear trauma of Adolf Hitler caused by the bomb attack in 1944

Roelf M. Backus, ENT-doctor (ret.)

"Right ear: large kidney shaped rupture at the front and back, bleeding strongly.
Whispering only noticed when close to the ear. Combined deafness of middle and inner ear.
Left ear: three-millimeter-long slit at the bottom. Whispering heard at four meters.
Mild combined deafness."

This is what Erwin Giesing, HNO-Arzt notes on July 22, 1944 from his ear- and hearing investigation with Adolf Hitler, who fell victim to a bomb attack two days before.

On Thursday, July 20, 1944, an attack took place on Adolf Hitler. The Führer survives the bomb explosion wonderfully and is only slightly injured. A few burns, scrapes, his clothing was torn and he had an ear trauma on both sides. After two days he gets an earache, he hears poorly and blood comes out of his ear. Hitler does not sleep well and calls for an ear specialist, it is *Dr.med. Erwin Giesing, HNO-Arzt. [ENT-doctor]*



*The Wolfsschanze, Thursday July 20, 1944 after the bomb attack.
(Bundesarchiv)*

An urgent telephone call

Erwin Giesing works as an ENT specialist in July 1944 in the Lazarett Rastenburg-Karlshof in Prussia -nowadays Kętrzyn in Poland- head: prof. Karl Brandt.



Wolfsschanze – Rastenburg (Google)

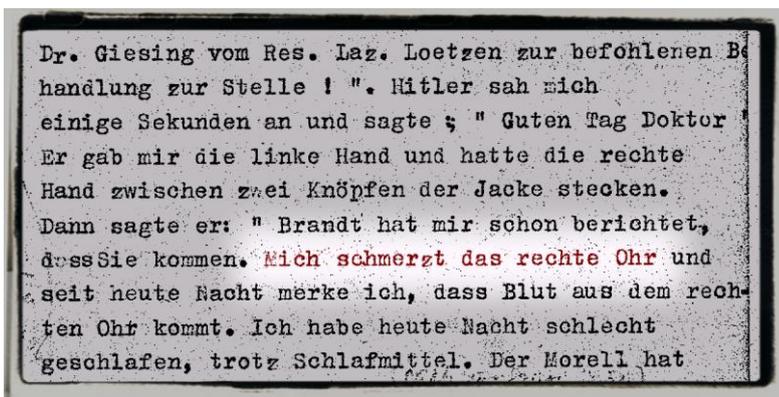
On Saturday, July 22, he received a telephone call from SS-Gruppenführer [Lieutenant General] Brandt at home around 9:00 AM to come to the Lazarett Rastenburg as several soldiers with ear injuries had arrived. After research and treatment of 11 officers, he is about to get into the car at around 12:30 PM when he is recalled by Prof. Brandt from an open window. A phone call has just arrived stating that the Fuehrer has an earache and Giesing is urged to go with Brandt to the FHQ, Fuehrer Head Quarter as quickly as possible: the Wolfsschanze, about 9 km east of Rastenburg. Giesing is the closest ENT doctor at that time.

Stringent safety measures

Giesing and Prof. Brandt rush to the Führer bunker where Adolf Hitler is located. As they approach the site, they are forced to stop three times at checkpoints with lowered barriers, each of which carefully checks their papers and always consults by telephone with the next post. At the last checkpoint, Giesing and Prof. Brandt have to get out and continue on foot to the Führer's bunker.

Once inside the bunker they are taken to an office. Giesing must empty his briefcase. Everything is being investigated. The packed instruments, head mirror and associated examination lamp are unpacked and viewed, even the light bulb is removed and carefully inspected. The guard officer then repacks the instruments and returns them to Giesing. Now Giesing has to hand over his cap and dagger, he doesn't carry his pistol. He has to open his jacket, empty his pockets, put the contents on the table and pull out the linings of his jacket and pants. He is then searched extensively, whereby the lining of his uniform is meticulously scanned. He gets his keys and handkerchief back. His fountain pen, pencil and pocket knife are placed on a table. Two bottles with pantocaine and a sterile saline solution are kept separately. Prof. Brandt is still trying to convince the security guards that this is a normal local anesthetic and is necessary for the examination that may be painful, but Giesing does not get his bottles back; they are held back by SS-Hauptsturmführer [Captain] Heinz Linge, until Giesing needs them.

Giesing is brought to the dining room. The examination will take place here. In a corner there is a chair for Hitler and a stool for Giesing. Linge helps to display the instruments on a round table. Hitler enters after about 5 minutes.



Dr. Giesing vom Res. Laz. Loetzen zur befohlenen Behandlung zur Stelle ! ". Hitler sah mich einige Sekunden an und sagte ; " Guten Tag Doktor Er gab mir die linke Hand und hatte die rechte Hand zwischen zwei Knöpfen der Jacke stecken. Dann sagte er: " Brandt hat mir schon berichtet, dass Sie kommen. **Mich schmerzt das rechte Ohr** und seit heute Nacht merke ich, dass Blut aus dem rechten Ohr kommt. Ich habe heute Nacht schlecht geschlafen, trotz Schlafmittel. Der Morell hat

from: Erwin Giesing, 'Bericht über meine Behandlung bei Hitler' (p.9)
(Rapport regarding my treatment of Hitler)

Hitler says that he has pain in his right ear and that blood came out that night. He has received from Dr. Morell -Hitler's personal physician- a *Phanodorm* (cyclobarbitol) tablet and at seven in the morning he took one more, but nevertheless he did not sleep well.

During the case history, Giesing notices that Hitler speaks very loudly, turns his left ear towards the speaker and looks at the speaker's lips. Giesing knows that with an explosion trauma there can also be damage to the inner ear, which explains the loud speech of Hitler. Hitler continues: '*...ich höre rechts fast gar nichts, links aber auch nicht viel und habe dauernd ein hohes Summgeräusch in beiden Ohren... Doktor, kann das vom Ohr herkommen mit dem Schwindelgefühl? ...alle Leute aus meiner Umgebung sagen, dass ich seit vorgestern so schreie.*' [!]

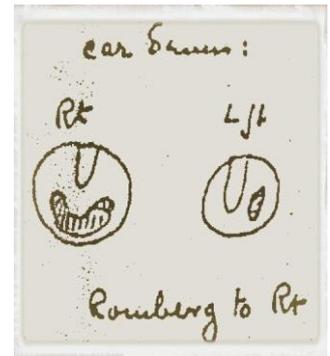
["I'm deaf in my right ear, at the left side the hearing is also not good...and there is continuous ringing in my ears...Doctor, is the dizziness related to my ears? ... since yesterday everybody complains about my loud shouting."]

ENT examination

After instructing Linge how to hold the examination light, Giesing inspects the eardrums:

Left Ear: a slit of 3 mm with bloody edges just below the hammer shank. Whisper speech distance: 4 meters. Tests with the tuning forks according to Struycken indicate a mild, mixed hearing impairment with emphasis on the perception component.

Right Ear: a lot of blood in the ear canal, this is carefully cleaned with a sterile cotton pad, no lesion in the ear canal wall. Large kidney shaped central eardrum perforation, with ragged edges and highly bleeding. Whisper speech is only heard directly *ad concham* [close to the ear]. Tuning fork tests: the 4000 Hz tuning fork is observed for 7 seconds (n = 35 seconds), the 250 Hz tuning fork 32 seconds. (n = 70 seconds). Giesing calculates a mixed hearing loss with 80% perception and 50% conduction. With patient's eyes closed, there is a tendency to fall the right and a nystagmus to the right is observed. Conclusion: inner ear trauma (Rt).



Sketches of the eardrums of the Führer, drawn by Giesing. *

* the eardrum sketches with English captions are probably drawn later, during Giesing's internment.

Hearing loss calculation

The calculation of hearing loss is based on the fact that a conductive hearing impairment leads to a low-frequency hearing loss, measured with the 250 Hz tuning fork and a perception impaired hearing leads to a high-frequency hearing loss for which the 4000 Hz tuning fork is used.

- the low frequency is observed for 32 seconds, $n = 70$, $32/70 = 0.46$ still present → 54% conduction loss
- the high frequency is observed for 7 seconds, $n = 35$, $7/35 = 0.20$ still present → 80% perception loss

Further examination

In the supplementary ENT examination, a septum deviation is also observed. Giesing also sees a scar above the right tonsil - Hitler can remember a tonsillitis but no abscess - and some tonsil debris. The mirror examination of the larynx is exceptionally smooth, Hitler is an exemplary patient.

Giesing finds slightly hollow vocal cords and incomplete closure. Nothing is seen of the vocal cord polyps on the left, operated by Prof. von Eicken in 1935 at the time. Giesing believes that the vocal-chord appearance fits well with the veiled and somewhat raw voice of "... someone who has a poor speaking technique" [!]

Giesing also mentions in his report that he must heat his throat mirror with the light bulb of the examination light, since SS-Hauptsturmführer Linge has confiscated his alcohol burner.

Of course Hitler wants to know how long this will take and Giesing tells him "without infection the perforation on the right will close spontaneously in 5-6 weeks and on the left in 3-4 weeks." The large amount of blood in the middle ear however is a breeding ground for infections, he explains, but he wants to wait to treat it for another day.

Around 1:30 PM, Giesing and Brandt leave the Führer's bunker and Prof. Brandt proposes to also take a look at the other officers who were wounded in the bomb explosion and are being nursed in a nearby building annex the Wolfsschanze. Giesing is asked to take over their treatment as the responsible ENT doctor, Prof. von Eicken, undoubtedly can use some help in treating 22 [!] patients with ruptured eardrums. Giesing is finished at 3:30 PM.

The treatment

The next day, Sunday, July 23, 1944, Giesing does a follow-up and sees Hitler again and, again goes through the same extensive safety ritual. Upon examination, the picture is virtually unchanged and the right ear is still bleeding. Giesing proposes etching of the eardrum perforation.

Hitler agrees but does not want local anesthesia: *'Nein Doktor, ich werde das so schon aushalten! Ich habe in meinem Leben schon mehr ausgehalten und so schlimm wird es ja hoffentlich nicht werden.'* [No doctor, I'll endure that! I have endured more in my life and hopefully it will not be that bad.]

Giesing etches the eardrum with a 5% lactic acid solution and inflates some blood-quiencing *Clauden powder* (protein concentrate + clioquinol). Hitler shows no reaction at all!

The fall inclination and nystagmus are also still present and Giesing advises the Führer bed rest, but Hitler resolutely rejects that advice, he only promises to go to bed earlier. Dr. Morell -nickname:

Reichsspritzenmeister- [Syringe Master of the Reich], Hitler's personal physician, is still eager with his syringes and "blood-stubbing pills", but Giesing and the other doctors present, think that's nonsense. Hitler however allows Morell to do what he likes.

Monday, July 24, Giesing is driving back to the Wolfsschanze. Hitler's both ears are now doing better, but the hearing loss and dizziness have not changed. While cleaning the ear, it starts bleeding again. Giesing now etches the perforation with a 5% *silver nitrate* solution and again without anesthesia. Hitler likes to be explained everything about hearing and the eardrum and also wants to know everything about the ear defects of the other wounded officers. Giesing is busy for some time with a kind of private lecture.



During his many visits to the FHQ, Giesing is also approached by other officers, "... whether he wants to look into their ears too."

In the meantime, Hitler remains very curious and would also like to see an eardrum. SS-Hauptsturmführer Linge must be "the patient" and Hitler gets the forehead mirror from Giesing, he makes several attempts but he sees nothing ...

Giesing later brings an electric otoscope with which the Führer finally manages to view the eardrum of Heinz Linge.

Linge later tells that the Führer has gone crazy afterwards and wants to see the eardrums of everyone in the bunker with the otoscope. Hitler is also busy with the tuning forks and asks Giesing to bring him an ENT textbook.

... if only he had become an ENT doctor.

Decursus

Giesing visits Hitler several more times to check. During the examination he sees the perforation on the left slowly closing, but the healing on the right is a little more difficult. A secreting ear develops, first serous with mucosal swelling in the middle ear, later purulent and infected. Morell is feverishly busy setting up a penicillin production line, but there is still insufficient available for the treatment of the Führer.

During Hitler's treatment, a tension arises between Giesing and Morell. Hitler has full confidence in both Giesing and Morell, but the latter is constantly eager with the syringe to administer the Führer iodine, calcium, liver-heart extracts and vitamin injections, as well as barbiturate tablets, amphetamines (*Pervitin*) and morphine. Giesing and the other doctors present find this all quackery and harmful to the condition of the Führer.

Over the following weeks the ears improve steadily. The perforation in the left eardrum closes, the perforation on the right becomes smaller, the secretion decreases, the hearing improves. The mastoid is not painful nor throbbing in all the follow-up checks. The balance disorders decrease. In the end, both perforations are closed and Hitler no longer has ear problems.

Treatment and check-ups continue until October 1944, after which Giesing says goodbye to his special patient.

Hitler personally appoints him as *Oberstabsarzt* [senior staff physician].



Hitler - with cotton plug in his right ear - visits Konteradmiral von Puttkamer who was injured in the bombing. Note the sticky fly paper at the left of the bed. (Bundesarchiv)

Summary

This is actually a banal medical history about a man with a double-sided traumatic eardrum perforation after an explosion trauma with subsequent spontaneous remission. Just because the patient is Adolf Hitler, who has inflicted so much suffering on millions of people, the report by ENT doctor Erwin Giesing is an important historical document reflecting that area.

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Appendix

Erwin Giesing (1907-1977), ENT doctor and *Begleitarzt* [treating physician] of Adolf Hitler accurately recorded his treatment of Hitler during his internment in 1945. He then hid the bulky report of no less than 177 typed A4 sheets and later, after his release in 1947, published it.

Karl Brandt (1904-1948), surgeon and *Begleitarzt*, SS-Gruppenführer [Lieutenant General], Commissioner General of Healthcare and various other senior positions. Brandt was convicted during the trial of the International Military Tribunal (IMT) in Nuremberg in 1946 and was executed in 1948.

Heinz Linge (1913-1980), SS-Obersturmbannführer [Lieutenant Colonel] and personal assistant / servant (valet) of Adolf Hitler at the end of the war.

Theodor Gilbert Morell (1886-1948) originally had a urology and electrotherapy practice in Berlin from 1918. From 1936 to 1945 he was the personal *Leibarzt* [court physician] of Adolf Hitler, whom he invariably calls "*patient A*" in his diary.

Carl Otto von Eicken (1873-1960), otorhinolaryngologist [ear-nose-throat doctor] and professor at the University of Berlin as successor to prof. Killian, removed in May 1935 and November 1944 a polyp from Hitler's left vocal cord.

His name can be found in the "*von Eicken method*" in which, after local anesthesia, the larynx is pulled forward with a thick probe -*von Eicken's hook*- to better inspect the hypopharynx.

(in: Burger 1918, p. 120)

Von Eicken did not stand trial in Nuremberg.

Karl-Jesko von Puttkamer (1900-1981), Konteradmiral [two ranks under Admiral = Major General of the Navy] in the Kriegsmarine and naval adjutant in Hitler's General Staff. Puttkamer was slightly injured in the bombing of 1944 and was in 1945 ordered to destroy all documents of the Fuehrer in Hitler's residence, *the Berghof* on the Obersalzberg in south Bavaria.

Von Puttkamer kept interned after the war until 1947.

Sources

- Erwin Giesing: *Bericht über meine Behandlung bei Hitler*. Wiesbaden 1945
- David Irving: *Die geheimen Tagebücher des Dr. Morell, Leibarzt Adolf Hitlers*. Munich 1983
- Wikipedia: 'Erwin Giesing', 'Theodor Morell', 'Wolfsschanze', 'Karl Brandt', 'Heinz Linge', 'Carl Otto von Eicken', 'Karl-Jesko von Puttkamer'
- YouTube: 'Die Deutsche Wochenschau, No. 33, 1944: reel 1'
- Bundesarchiv Berlin/National Geographic: *Erwin Giesing & Hitler*, video still from the NatGeo documentary 'Patient Hitler'



*Photo probably taken at Giesing's promotion to Oberstabsarzt
Bundesarchiv Berlin/National Geographic*

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*R.M. Backus
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