



Fig. 208. In the eye of the beholder, interestingly enough, the Swastika forms a Christian Cross with the four points stretched out as well the symbol of the European Union.

Fig. 209. Please note (above) - it's the youthful Hanna in this 1936 Olympics Games poster, with Leni Riefenstahl standing behind the Führer, photographing, while Hitler regarded the public with his famous Roman arm salute.

Fig. 210. Reitsch (right) is on a Luftwaffe poster dated 1946, with a futuristic model of the Messerschmitt fighter she piloted as a test pilot.



In 1943, after the Allies began to step-up their devastating around-the-clock bombing campaign over Germany's cities, the Nazi aviatrix Flugkapitän **Hanna Reitsch** proposed to Hitler and Göring to create an all ladies fighter squadron against the American-British air forces' wholesale bombing of Germany. She wore her Iron Crosses proudly and wrote her memoirs, *Fliegen, mein Leben* (1951), which were translated in 1954 as *Flying is My Life*. In this book she presents herself as a patriot, and makes no moral judgments about Hitler and Nazi Germany. Some call it "an exercise in selective memory, rationalization, and denial". Many ask: was she a Nazi to the end, or just a proud woman?

We don't know? . . . perhaps both!



Fig. 211. **Luftwaffe Pilot-Observer Badge with Diamonds**, this badge belonged to Hermann Göring, and was part of Eric Campion Collection. The lady was a test pilot in the German Air force, **Flug-Kapitänin Hanna Reitsch**, who flew everything from a V-1 to giant bombers, recognized as the rocket-propelled Messerschmitt Me 163 *Komet* test pilot for the Air force. She was the only recipient of this exclusive award. Hanna also held the unusual honor as a woman to have had bestowed upon her both the Iron Cross Second Class and First Class of the 1939 series, receiving the Iron Cross Second Class on 28 March 1941 and the Iron Cross First Class on 5 November 1942. She became Adolph Hitler's favorite pilot. Reitsch was the only woman awarded the Iron Cross First Class during World War II, and the only woman awarded the Luftwaffe Combined Pilot and Observer Badge with Diamonds.

Fig. 212. The **Me 163 Komet**, designed by Alexander Martin Lippisch, was the only operational rocket-powered fighter aircraft during the Second World War. Although revolutionary and capable of performance unrivalled at the time, it proved ineffective as a fighter and resulted in the destruction of very few Allied aircraft—the leading edge aircraft was not very maneuverable, still not combat ready. Reitsch flew this rocket-powered aircraft on the borderline of orbital space; for all practical purposes she can easily be named as the first pilot in space or *nazinaut*, i.e. astronaut!



The Messerschmitt Me 262A-1 was powered by two 900 kg thrust Jumo 004B turbojet engines providing a maximum speed of 870 kmh and a range on internal fuel of 1050 km. The Messerschmitt Me 262A-1a was armed with four 30 mm MK 108 cannons in the nose. While faster than the Allied aircraft of the time, the Messerschmitt Me 262 suffered from not being as maneuverable. However, the fastest and most dangerous plane that Ms Reitsch tested was the top secret German rocket plane, after three male pilots had died in their attempts. First she flew the prototype without the motor, the ME 163A. Then she flew the militarized version, the ME 163B, Komet. This experimental interceptor, in a minute and a half after takeoff climbed at a 65-degree angle to 30,000 feet. It travelled 500 mph -- the fastest any human had ever gone. Hanna Reitsch, Nazi Germany's celebrated woman test pilot who had flown the V-1 rocket bomb in sub orbital flight in the early 1940's -- 20 years before the first American spaceman -- was actually history's first astronaut.



Fig. 213-214. Reitsch received the Iron Cross in person from Hitler, and in time was honoured by the American elite, including a reception at the White House by John F. Kennedy, the American President (left).



Fig. 215. She was accepted as a member of the American Test Pilots' Association and was received by President John Kennedy in the White House in 1961. A photo shows her standing near Kennedy, not wearing her self-designed uniform but a dress and carrying a woman's handbag... At the age of 65, the year before she died, she set a new women's distance record in a glider. Hanna died of a massive heart attack in 1979 at age 67. As she wished, she was buried near her family in Salzburg, Austria. Fig. 216. A youthful portrait of the prolific pilot. 🐞

Hanna Reitsch - She flew everything the Third Reich had.

The world's first female test pilot and helicopter pilot, Hanna flew everything the Third

Reich had: from the first helicopter (the Focke-Achgelis) to the prototype of a piloted V-1. She went on to set more than 40 altitude and endurance records in motorless and powered aircraft in her lifetime. In 1945 she flew the last plane out of Berlin hours before the fall of the city. Although politics had nothing to do with her love of flight, she was the only woman ever to be awarded the Iron Cross and Luftwaffe Diamond Clasp.



Hanna was first to fly a glider over the Alps, flew the first jet plane, first to fly a rocket in sub-orbital flight, was the only woman to receive the Third Reich's highest award for bravery. She was actually the world's first astronaut.

The real mother of women's liberation was almost lost in history for being on the wrong side.

Hanna Reitsch died quietly in bed in Frankfurt, Germany one year after setting a new women's distance record in a glider.

Her 67-year-old body bore faded scars of long-ago plane crashes. Her mind held memories of Adolph Hitler and her heart still carried Nazi pride which kept her out of contemporary history deserved fame.

Many underscore: If this tiny woman had died 40 years earlier hundreds of Londoners killed by Nazi V-1 and V-2 bombs might still be alive. Scores of dead Allied airmen shot down by well-designed German fighter planes could be playing with their great grand-children. The jet age would have taken longer to arrive on the scene, and man might still be striving to walk on the moon, but then, those who must win in war and dominate worldly meridians hardly consider the value of human life in light of what technological progress can accomplish for a barbarian race hell bent on dominating the human race, the other side of Paradise, for west of Eden, I still think, there's no room for this Barbarian voyeur from the flatlands of the River Ganges...

Regardless, it is a fact to remember: Hanna Reitsch, Nazi Germany's celebrated woman test pilot who had flown the V-1 rocket bomb in sub orbital flight in the early 1940's – 20 years before the first American spaceman – was actually history's first astronaut!

She began by wanting to be a flying missionary but laws kept her from flying airplanes and she began in gliders, winning dozens of competitions and attracting the attention of Hitler. She soon became Nazi Germany's ideal woman, young and vivacious, daring and highly publicized by the Nazi propaganda machine.

If she hadn't been on the losing side and if she had been later willing to admit the horrors of the Nazi regime, maybe Hanna Reitsch would have been honored in history books as the greatest woman pilot that ever lived. Moreover, the peanut size bachelor officer of the Third Reich was probably the mother of Women's Liberation Movement, way ahead of Gloria Swanson or some Florence Nightingale, having bested men in every flying competition.

At a time when women were expected to stay in the kitchen, she was one of the world's top glider pilots. She held 40 world aviation records; was the first to cross the Alps in a glider, first to fly a helicopter and first to fly a jet plane. She was the first woman awarded the treasured Iron Cross and was the world's first woman test pilot.

History records she flew into a burning Berlin at night in the last days of the war and landed a small plane safely on a street by the Reichstag fired upon by approaching Russian tanks. A direct hit on her plane mangled the foot of the pilot, Ritter von Greim, who had been summoned by Adolph Hitler himself to take charge of the German Luftwaffe.

Hanna stayed three days in the Hitler underground bunker then flew the last plane out of Berlin before it fell to the Russians. Her eye-witness account of the last days of Hitler is an important part of history and her flights in the V-1 flying bomb are a first chapter in space travel. Surely, she was the world's first astronaut! Still, prompted by ever-present victorious Allies, such recognition was spurred; she never married and died in obscurity. However, she often complained:

"But there are millions in Germany who love me. It is only the German press which has been told to hate me. It is propaganda helped by the government. Germans have not been allowed to write about me since 1945. They are afraid I might say something good about Adolph Hitler."

She adored her 'mien Fuhrer'... "Because of Hitler, she said, "we Germans were the pioneers of space travel, ahead of our time, ahead of the world. The first space rockets were copies of our V-2 bombs which climbed to 50 miles altitude. After the war my dear friend Wernher von Braun helped the Americans. He was brilliant with the V-2 rocket and the father of all space travel and satellite technology.

"I am surprised I am still alive. So many of my friends were killed. Ten of us test flew the V1 rocket. Five were killed and three severely injured.

"The V-1 was built to fly as a robot controlled by an early auto-pilot – something else we designed. It was almost impossible to fly with fins or wings just three feet long. But I flew it ten times.

"Catapulted from a sled, it produced more than 24 G's acceleration force, enough to burst body organs as we learned from experiments and dead pilots."

Describing her famous Berlin flight to Hitler:

"In November 1944 the capital was being devastated by US and British bombers. My presence was important. German radio broadcast to the city, 'Stand fast. Hanna Reitsch endures this with you.' Hitler has asked her to come in and see him in his last days.

"For several days I flew around the city memorizing landmarks until I knew I would be able to find (about the city) without radio assistance."

Air Force General Ritter Von Greim learned of Hanna's planning and asked her to join him on a perilous night flight into Berlin to see Adolph Hitler at his bunker under the Chancellery.

It happened on the night of April 26, 1945 when the city was under heavy Russian attack. The first aircraft they were to use was destroyed by bombs, so

They transferred to a tiny Fiesler Storch spotter plane and, using Hanna's memorized landmarks, flew slowly into the burning city, landing in a hail of Russian tank fire on a street outside the German Chancellery. A heavy Russian bullet pierced their little plane and destroyed General Greim's right foot.

Die-hard Nazi SS troops around the headquarters rushed them to an elevator at the bunker just before the Russians began scoring direct hits on the building.

None of Hitler's close associates were in the underground bunker except Nazi Party Secretary Martin Bormann, Propaganda Minister Dr Josef Gobbles, his German 'First Lady' wife, Magda and their six children.

On the upper levels Hanna met Bormann, an admiral, several generals and secretaries. On the lower level were private quarters for Hitler, his girl-friend, Eva Braun and Hitler's doctor. She recalls in her writings:

"They were all very moved to see me come in; all were calm and ready to die. History books say Hitler was mad and incoherent, that many in the bunker were drunk and having sex parties.

"It is not true. I was there. We were seeing the end of a great man and his cause. There was nothing in the bunker but dignity. Hitler greeted us quietly and without emotion.

"He heard Greim report from a stretcher on the floor. He knelt to shake his hand and, turning, told Hanna:

"You are a very brave woman. There is still loyalty and courage in the world."

Hitler explained he'd asked them to come because Luftwaffe head Herman Göring had refused an order to fly in. Instead he had sent a telegram asking to take over as new Chancellor.

Said Hitler:

"Nothing is spared me. No allegiances are kept. No honor is lived up to. There are no disappointments I have not had, no betrayals I have not experienced and now this above all else. Nothing remains. Every wrong has already been done..."

Hitler now officially fired Göring, taking away his rank, titles and properties and named General Greim Göring's successor, promoting him to a Field Marshall. But Greim now commanded an air force which no longer existed. He and Hanna Reitsch were trapped.

Handing them two vials of poison, Hitler said:

"Hanna, you are a loyal German and belong to those who will die with me... I do not wish that one of us falls to the Russians alive, nor do I wish our bodies to be found by them. Eva and I will have our bodies burned. You will devise your own method."

Hitler's refused Hanna's pleas to fly him out. And Eva Braun said:

"I do not wish to live in a Germany without an Adolph Hitler. It would not be fit to live in for a true German."

Hanna and Greim decided they would swallow the poison and blow themselves up with a heavy hand-grenade just before the Russians broke in.

As the Russian bombardment intensified, plaster fell even at the lowest levels of the bunker. Sleep was impossible. And yet, for a time, there was hope for rescue by German forces. Hitler, holding a battered auto road map, even planned a counter attack

But Hanna was certain she'd never see daylight again when she learned on April 29th that SS General Herman Fegelein, Eva Braun's brother-in-law, had been brought back from the city under guard to the underground headquarters and shot on Hitler's orders for trying to escape from the bunker.

Then, just after midnight, Hitler visited Greim and Reitsch. He held a *Reuters* news agency dispatch reporting that Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler was offering to surrender German armies in the west to General Eisenhower.

It was the last blow. "Even Himmler has betrayed me," said Hitler. He ordered Hanna and Greim to break out of Berlin, take command of the air force and arrest Himmler.

It was also the end for Hitler. By next morning he had drawn up his last will and testament and married Eva Braun. Hours later they were dead of poison and a gun-shot wound.

Above the bunker, amid earth shaking explosions, ears deafened by concussion and under a sky red with flames, Hanna Reitsch and Ritter Von Greim were picked up by an SS armored car.

Inching through the rubble of street wreckage and barely avoiding Russian troops, they reached a small German Arado 96 scout-plane and its waiting pilot. Chances of escape were slim. Three must fly out in a plane built for two on just twelve hundred feet of still undamaged roadway. Shells were falling around Reichstag and the Russians were closing in fast.

At the last possible moment the tiny plane got off the ground and slowly climbed. Over the Brandenburg Gate it was caught in Russian searchlights and heavy cross-fire. But in a few minutes it was hidden in dense smoke clouds. Soon, high above them, Hanna Reitsch entered a still and peaceful sky over the doomed city and flew to safety.

Next morning at Plön, in northern Germany, Hanna and Greim met Grand Admiral Dönitz, Hitler's successor and learned the war was finished. On May 9th, two days after Germany surrendered, Hanna Reitsch gave herself up to the Americans.

Because Hitler's body was never seen by the allies it was widely believed for years that Hanna Reitsch flew out of Berlin with Hitler or his secretary Martin Bormann, which as it turned out was untrue.

Hanna was a proud Nazi and wore her Iron Cross proudly to her dying day, her last comments:

"And what have we now in Germany? A land of bankers and car-makers. Even our great army has gone soft. Soldiers wear beards and question orders. I am not ashamed to say I believed in National Socialism. I still wear the Iron Cross with diamonds Hitler gave me. But today in all Germany you can't find a single person who voted Adolph Hitler into power."

Then she uttered the words that for so long kept her out of the history books:

"Many Germans feel guilty about the war. But they don't explain the real guilt we share - that we lost."

At the age of 65, the year before she died, she set a new women's distance record in a glider. Hanna died of a massive heart attack in 1979 at age 67. As she wished, she was buried near her family in Salzburg, Austria.



Fig. 217. Two Jumo 004 engines powered the ME 262. This was the first jet fighter to fly in combat. As a boy on the farm in Iowa, a neighbor was gunner on a B-17 bomber flying on bombing missions over Germany and occupied Europe; he had seen this Me 262 as well as the delta-wing version, which has scared the hell out of the entire crew; he never got a shot off on either one of the targets as they whizzed by at almost supersonic speeds. In WW-II, among other German military aircraft, Hanna Reitsch flew this sleek **Messerschmitt 262**, which marked the beginning of modern jet aircraft flight, in fact, she was the only *nazinaut* and the first *astronaut* among her American brethren to reach the earthly edge of space, i.e. the first human in space on this planet Earth. Also, she wore her Iron Crosses proudly and wrote her memoirs, *Fliegen, mein Leben* (1951), which were translated in 1954 as *Flying is My Life*. In this book she presents herself as a patriot, and makes no moral judgments about Hitler and Nazi Germany. Fräulein Hanna Reitsch's rank was : Flugkapitän [Captain of the Air Force -- Honorary title given for outstanding aeronautical achievement].

Excerpted from, "**A Secret Weapon**", pp-120-125, from a 163-page, 294 illustrations document on the significance of the V-1 & V-2 German wartime missiles for development of postwar ICBM rocketry and space vehicles generally. Moreover, this perhaps most unusual of women and first human in space was by accident the last living official person to see Hitler alive prior to the Führer's suicide on April 28, 1945. Copyright©27 August 2007 by Prof. Paul S. Cutter, Europe