



DOORNSE HISTORISCHE VERENIGING THORHEIM

Four years ago, in August 2014, we marked the centenary of the beginning of the First World War with our account of the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Habsburg throne, at Sarajevo on June 28, 1914 (see *After the Battle No. 164*). Now, four years on, we want to remember the end of that war by describing the death of Kaiser Wilhelm II, the ruler of Prussia and of the German Empire, who was widely seen as the symbol of German aggression and the one responsible for the outbreak of the war. November 1918 — 100 years ago this month — not only saw the end of the gruesome conflict and the signing

of the armistice at Compiègne but also the abdication of Wilhelm II and his seeking exile in neutral Holland. For the next 23 years, the ex-Kaiser lived the quiet life of a country gentleman, an ordinary civilian of no political importance. However, by the time he died on June 4, 1941, having lived to the age of 82, the Netherlands had been invaded and occupied by Nazi Germany. Although Wilhelm had stipulated that he wanted a quiet funeral with no pomp and no Swastikas, the internment at his estate at House Doorn was a Nazi-orchestrated affair with a guard of honour, a military band and a huge wreath from the Führer.

Shortly after 6 a.m. on the morning of November 10, 1918, a convoy of nine motor vehicles was seen approaching the Belgian-Dutch frontier post at the village of Eijsden in the southernmost part of the Netherlands. The Dutch guard on duty, Sergeant Pierre Pinckaers, halted the convoy and, to his surprise, discovered that it carried the German emperor, Kaiser Wilhelm II, and members of his retinue. They had left the Kaiser's headquarters in Spa where only a few hours before Wilhelm, forced by revolution and mutiny in his empire, had been compelled to give up the throne. The Germans requested to be admitted into the country, explaining that the Kaiser and some of his generals wanted to seek asylum in Holland and that the Dutch government had already been informed about this. The border post had no telephone, so Pinckaers cycled down to the nearby zinc-white factory and from there phoned his garrison commander in Maastricht, Majoor G. van Dijk. The latter confirmed what the Germans had said, having already received a call from Maurits van Vollehove, the Dutch envoy in Brussels, two hours earlier, and immediately drove down to the frontier post where he decided to allow the German party entry into the country.

The motor convoy was directed to Eijsden's railway station, two kilometres on, where the party had to spend several hours in a bare waiting room. At 8.10 a.m., the Kaiser's special train arrived there as well,

**Right: House Doorn, located in the village of that name, is today a museum visited by tens of thousands each year.**

# DEATH OF THE KAISER

By Karel Margry

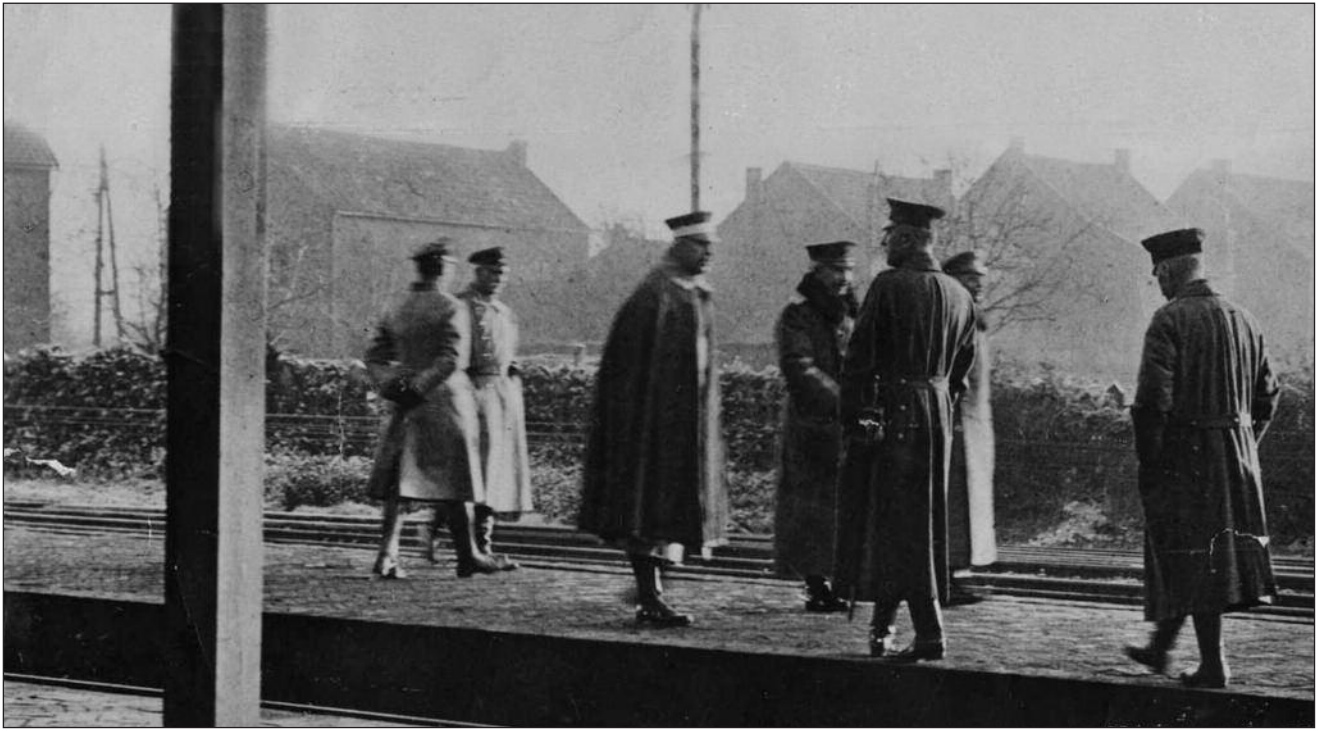
having travelled from Spa via Liège to the Visé/Eijsden frontier post (Liège had been considered too risky for the Kaiser to travel through, hence he and his party had transferred to motor cars in order to circumvent it). It too was allowed to enter Holland,

enabling the Kaiser to await developments in the comfort of his own saloon and restaurant carriages.



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Having arrived by car at the Dutch frontier early on the morning of November 10, 1918, the Kaiser and his entourage were allowed to enter the country and directed to nearby Eijsden railway station, there to await the decision of the Dutch government over the Kaiser's request for asylum. Another reason for going to the station was because the Kaiser's personal train was expected to arrive there from Liège. When the German party arrived at Eijsden, a local 17-year-old teenager, Viktor Sniekers, ran to his home, picked up his 9 x 12cm plate camera and returned to take

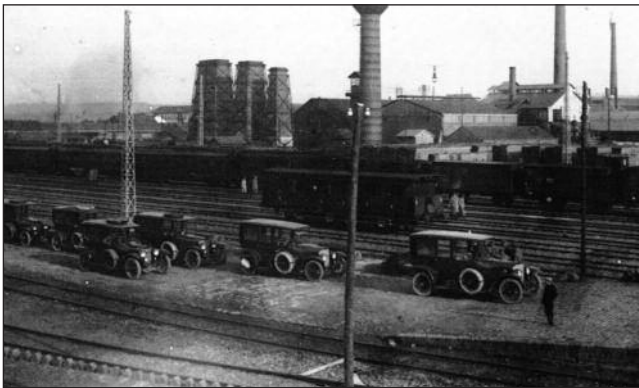
this snapshot of the Kaiser and members of his retinue waiting on the station platform — a picture that went round the world. Standing (L-R) are Hauptmann Sigurd von Ilsemann, the Kaiser's youthful Flügeladjutant (Wing Adjutant); Generaloberst Hans von Plessen, his Generaladjutant (ADC of general's rank); Generalmajor Wilhelm von Frankenberg, Oberstallmeister (Grand Master of the Horse); Kaiser Wilhelm; Major Georg von Hirschfeld, another of the Kaiser's wing adjutants; Dr Otto von Niedner, his personal physician, and Hauptmann Albert Zeys, his chauffeur.

For the rest of the day and throughout the evening, the Kaiser and his party languished in Eijsden station, waiting for a decision of the Dutch government, while an increasing crowd of curious civilians milled around, many of them shaking fists and shouting abuse at the deposed emperor. Then, shortly before midnight a party, including the Secretary-General of the Dutch Interior Ministry, Jan B. Kan, and the German ambassador Friedrich Rosen, arrived from The Hague with the news that the Dutch government had granted the Kaiser asylum and that Count Godard van Aldenburg-Bentinck, who like Wilhelm was a Knight of St John of Jerusalem, had agreed to temporarily accommodate the Kaiser at his 17th-century moated house at the small town of Amerongen.

At 9.20 a.m. the following morning (November 11) the train set out, travelling northwards — along a route thronged with jeering people — via Maastricht, Roermond and Nijmegen to Arnhem and then west-



The small station has been completely altered but this is the same platform today.



Left: The cars of the German party were parked nearby. The local zinc-white factory, from where border guard Sergeant Pierre



Pinckaerts phoned his superior in Maastricht, stands in the background. Right: This is the best possible comparison today.





**Left:** With the Dutch government having decided to grant the Kaiser refuge, Count Godard van Aldenburg-Bentinck was persuaded to accommodate Wilhelm for a few days in his castle at Amerongen. This picture was taken there on November 28, the day on which Wilhelm formally abdicated. (L-R) Carlos



**Bentinck, Dr von Niedner, von Plessen, Hans von Gontard (Lord Chamberlain), Wilhelm II, Werner von Grünau (Foreign Office legate), Edgar von Hirschfeld (adjutant), Ernst zu Rantzau (chamberlain), Count Bentick and Willy Bentinck. Right:** Kasteel Amerongen has seen virtually no change in 100 years.



**Left:** Newspaper reporters, press photographers and other curious sightseers roamed around the castle hoping for a glimpse of the deposed ruler, and officers from the Kaiser's retinue tried in vain to chase them off with drawn swords.



**The brick wall on the left is the one surrounding the castle estate. Right:** The same wall still lines Drostestraat today. Kasteel Amerongen is nowadays a museum and open to the public.

wards to the little country station at Maarn, where they were received by the provincial governor of Utrecht, Count Alex Lijnden van Sandenburg, and by Count Bentinck. It was a half-hour's drive to Amerongen. The Bentincks (the count was a widower with three sons and a daughter) received the Germans with good hospitality, providing them with a lavish dinner. That same day, at Compiègne, Germany signed the armistice that ended the First World War.

The following day, November 12, the Kaiser's eldest son, Crown Prince Wilhelm (who had commanded the 5. Armee and then Heeresgruppe Deutscher Kronprinz in the war), arrived at the Dutch frontier and was granted asylum as well. He spent his first night at Castle Hillenraad at Swalmen and would eventually be interned on Wieringen, a small island in the Zuider Zee near Den Helder in north-western Holland (where he would stay in exile for five years, returning to Germany on November 9, 1923).

**Right:** A picture taken at Amerongen on May 14, 1920, the last day of the Kaiser and Kaiserine's 18-month stay there. Standing (L-R): Count Bentinck, Wilhelm, Dr Alfred Haehner (personal physician of the Royal couple since November 1919), Adjutant von Ilsemann and Lord Chamberlain von Gontard. Seated (L-R): Auguste Viktoria, Elisabeth van Aldenburg-Bentinck (the count's eldest daughter) and Countess Mathilde von Keller, lady in waiting. (When this picture was taken, von Ilsemann and Elisabeth Bentinck had just announced their engagement. They would marry on October 7 that same year.)

On November 28, the Kaiser's spouse, Auguste Viktoria, joined him at Amerongen after an anxious journey from Berlin. That same day, Wilhelm regulated the German constitutional question by signing a formal abdication both as Kaiser and as King of Prussia. Two days later, the Crown Prince similarly renounced his rights.

The first months at Amerongen were an uneasy time for the 59-year-old ex-monarch for there were numerous journalists and press photographers, both Dutch and for-

eign, roaming around the brick-walled estate hoping for a story or a scoop photograph of him; also there were repeated rumours — some false, some true — of plans to assassinate or kidnap the Kaiser; and there was a good possibility that the Western Allies would want to persecute him as a war criminal.

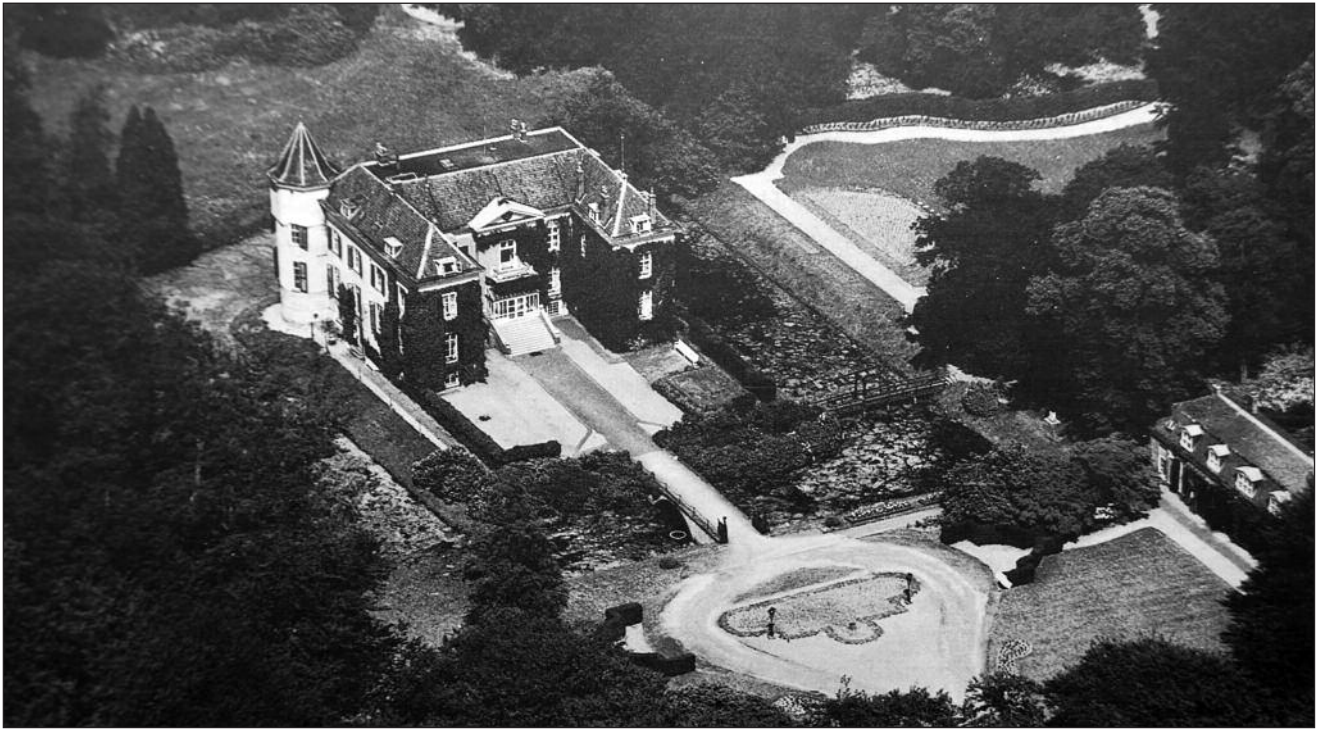
Article 227 of the Treaty of Versailles, concluded in June 1919, called for the trial of the ex-Kaiser, arraigining him 'for a supreme offence against international morality and



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**In August 1919, the Kaiser and his wife had bought House Doorn, a pleasant moated manor-house lying in 59 hectares of parkland in the village of Doorn. Before they moved in, the**

**house was completely renovated. At lower right is the estate's orangery, which the couple had converted into a guest-house.**

the sanctity of treaties'. However, as early as December 1918, the Dutch Government had made it clear that they had no intention of handing over a ruler who had sought asylum in a neutral country. On January 16, 1920, French Prime Minister George Clemenceau on behalf of the Entente nations formally requested the Dutch Government to extradite the accused but the Dutch (who were not signatories to the Versailles Treaty) stoutly and repeatedly refused to comply. All they asked of Wilhelm was a promise to refrain from active politics, a pledge he gave and observed.

It was clear that the Kaiser could not stay at Amerongen indefinitely so on August 16, 1919, he bought House Doorn, a moated country-house, for the price of 500,000 Dutch guilders. Located in the village of Doorn, nine kilometres west of Amerongen and 25 kilometres east of Utrecht, in large parkland suitably secure from intruders, the house was a 13th-century castle radically rebuilt at the end of the 18th century. Before the Kaiser moved in, he had the house altered and refurbished at a cost of 850,000 guilders. The orangery was turned into a guest-house. The main entrance to the park was removed from the Utrecht—Arnhem road to a quieter side road, the Langbroekerweg, and a new and impressive gatehouse was built to accommodate his retinue and cater for the guards.

The Kaiser would have no problem furnishing his new home. Through the summer of 1919, 59 train wagons arrived from Germany, loaded to the full with his possessions from his many castles and estates: furniture, carpets, paintings of his ancestors, jewellery, his library, hundreds of uniforms — everything from bed-linen to porcelain pieces, from silver cutlery to his collection of snuff-boxes. On May 15, 1920 — after an 18-month stay at Amerongen — Wilhelm and his wife moved to their new home. Here he was to settle down, and spend the remaining 21 years of his life as a retired country gentleman.

However, personal tragedy soon struck the Kaiser. On July 18, Prince Joachim, his youngest son, disillusioned by the war and

its aftermath, shot himself in a hunting lodge near Potsdam. Still more sorrow was to come: on April 11, 1921, two months after their 40th wedding anniversary, Wilhelm's wife Auguste Viktoria died. Already a long-time heart patient, the outcome of the war, the forced move from Germany, and Joachim's suicide had all combined to fatally affect her health. She was taken back to Germany to be buried in Potsdam but the Dutch government refused Wilhelm permission to leave the country to attend the funeral.

Although stricken with grief over his loss, he soon recovered his spirits and found things to occupy himself. His main activity around this time was compiling a

'Comparative Historical Table' that was to prove that neither he nor Germany had been guilty of bringing about the war. Still obsessed with the events of the recent past, he was determined to justify his actions, sticking to his belief that he had been right and fostering a grievance against the world which had so misjudged him. The work was published in book form in 1921. (He would later follow it up with two memoirs, equally self-justifying, published in 1922 and 1927 respectively.)

In the course of 1922 Wilhelm got acquainted with Hermine Schönaich-Carolath (née Reuss Elder Line), a young widow of 34 with three sons and two daughters. The Kaiser enjoyed her company, she got along well with



**In April 1921 Empress Auguste Viktoria died but Wilhelm did not remain a widower for long, marrying Hermine Schönaich-Carolath (née Reuss) in November 1922. A widow of 34, she had five children and her youngest daughter Henriette came to live with her mother and stepfather at Doorn. Wilhelm affectionately called the little girl 'the general'.**



**Right:** Convinced that he needed exercise, Wilhelm spent an inordinate amount of time with his favourite hobby: wood-cutting. Every day he and members of his retinue and servants went out felling trees in the estate grounds, the Kaiser (who since birth had a lame and shorter left arm) doing his bit with only his right arm. Over the years they cut hundreds of trees. Here the Kaiser and his personnel pose with their rip-saws during a work break in wintertime.



him and on November 5, 1922, they were married. The wedlock raised quite a few eyebrows, both because of the short lapse of time since the death of Auguste Viktoria and because his new bride was 28 years his junior. The marriage was not a very happy one but Hermine and her three youngest children brought more liveliness to the household.

Daily life at Doorn settled into a regular routine. Wilhelm spent most mornings with his favourite pastime: cutting wood. A habit he had acquired during the war, he enthusiastically continued with it at Amerongen and Doorn and over the years literally felled



**A special wood-cutting shed was built in the grounds some distance south of the house (see the plan on page 13).**



**The original shed was demolished in the 1950s. Today a replacement stands on the same spot.**

thousands of trees, so much so that it eventually threatened to denude the Doorn estate. When he was not chopping and sawing wood, he spent his daytime hours dealing with his correspondence, developing a rose-garden and later an arboretum, or feeding the ducks on the moat. There were often visitors calling from Germany and other countries, and he spent hours talking with them or members of his retinue. His monologues at dinner table were notorious, and a source of particular torment to his faithful adjutant, Sigurd von Ilsemann.

Although granted exile, Wilhelm was not free to go as he pleased. At first he was only allowed to make trips within a 15-kilometre radius of Doorn. Later this area was expanded to the whole province of Utrecht. For each visit outside this area, Wilhelm was to secure special permission from his contact with the Dutch government, Secretary-General Kan. In general these permissions were given and there would be excursions to destinations further away, a favourite one being the beach resort at Zandvoort.

However, during all these quiet years he still

closely followed events taking place in Germany. Living in a world of his own, he remained confident that, sooner or later, the Weimar Republic would collapse, the monarchy would be restored and he would be able — better still, would be asked — to return to the throne. Every major event in Germany, in other European countries, even in the United States, he interpreted exclusively in this perspective. At times — for instance during the Kapp Putsch of March 1920 — he was sure that restoration of the monarchy was imminent. It was all nothing more than self-deception and illusions.

**The Kaiser having tea with friends near the wood-cutting shed. (L-R) Marius van Houten, the Dutch Marechaussee major (later colonel) who from 1920 to 1941 was in charge of the ex-Kaiser's security and guarding on behalf of the Dutch government and who over the years became a good friend of Wilhelm; George Viereck, a German-American poet and writer who often visited House Doorn; Adjutant von Ilsemann; Wilhelm, and Wilhelm von Dommès, the House Minister (tasked with representing the ex-Kaiser's interests in Germany). George Viereck, son of a German father and an American-born mother (and reputed to be an illegal grandson of Kaiser Wilhelm I) had been a bestselling poet and author in the United States before 1914 but became a controversial figure during the First World War because in his publications he argued for the German cause. He continued to write in defence of Germany and the Kaiser in the 1920s and later became a well-known pro-Nazi and anti-Semitic propagandist.**



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**Right: All through his years in exile Wilhelm craved for a restoration of the monarchy and his return to the throne, and for a time in the early 1930s he put his hopes on the upcoming Nazi movement, his expectations fired on by his wife Hermine who was a great fan of Hitler. On two occasions — in January 1931 and May 1932 — Hermann Göring came to visit the Kaiser at Doorn to discuss developments in Germany. Here Göring (who on his first visit was accompanied by his first wife Karin) leaves House Doorn with Princess Hermine and the Kaiser following behind.**



Throughout his exile he was in personal and written contact with German conservative, right-wing, monarchist and militaristic organisations such as the Deutsch-Nationale Volkspartei (German National People's Party, DNVP); the Nationalverband Deutscher Offiziere (National Association of German Officers, NDO); the Kyffhäuser-Bund (War Veterans Association); Stahlhelm (First World War Front Soldiers Association) and the Alldeutscher Verband (Pan-German League). All of these organisations were clearly monarchist, and thus important lobbies for Wilhelm's restorative ambitions (although he was often dissatisfied with their actions), but this was not so clear with the organisation, the growth of which he followed with increasing interest from 1930 onwards: the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter-Partei (NSDAP), Hitler's Nazi party.

Wilhelm's attitude towards Hitler's movement was distinctly ambivalent. On the one hand he approved of its basically nationalistic fervour; on the other he was disgusted by its racial persecution and deplored the pagan nihilism of Nazi ideology. For a time he appears to have seriously believed, along with the Crown Prince, that a Nazi victory in the elections would bring him back to the throne. His wife Hermine certainly regarded Hitler as Germany's saviour and trusted him completely, and several members of his retinue were equally enthusiastic about the Nazis.

On January 17-19, 1931, Hermann Göring, then Reichstag deputy for the NSDAP and Hitler's representative in Berlin, paid a special visit to Doorn, accompanied by his first wife Karin. The meeting had been arranged by Leopold von Kleist, the ex-Kaiser's Hausminister (House Minister, representing his interests in Germany) who was a pro-Nazi. During his three-day stay, Göring told Wilhelm that it was Hitler's aim to restore the monarchy. The Kaiser liked Göring, whom



The steps have changed little since Hermann came by.



he had decorated with the Pour le Mérite as an air ace and who had been friendly with the Crown Prince during the war, but he kept his distance and remained sceptical. On May 20-21, 1932, Göring came to Doorn for a second visit. This time the Kaiser was more welcoming (even though Göring was bragging and ruffled court etiquette) but, again, no definite assurances were given either way.

Meanwhile, his sons were more open in their flirtations with the Nazis. Both August Wilhelm and Oskar joined the NSDAP, and

**Left: Several of the Kaiser's sons and grandsons got more seriously involved in the Nazi movement. Crown Prince Wilhelm (centre) appeared at many Nazi-organised events, such as here with SA leader Ernst Röhm (left) and Stahlhelm leader Franz Seldte (right) at an SA mass meeting in 1932. The Nazis very cleverly kept the Hohenzollerns on a string, suggesting they would restore the monarchy if they came to power. In reality, they had no intention to do so, the purpose behind their deception being only to draw supporters of the monarchy into their camp.**

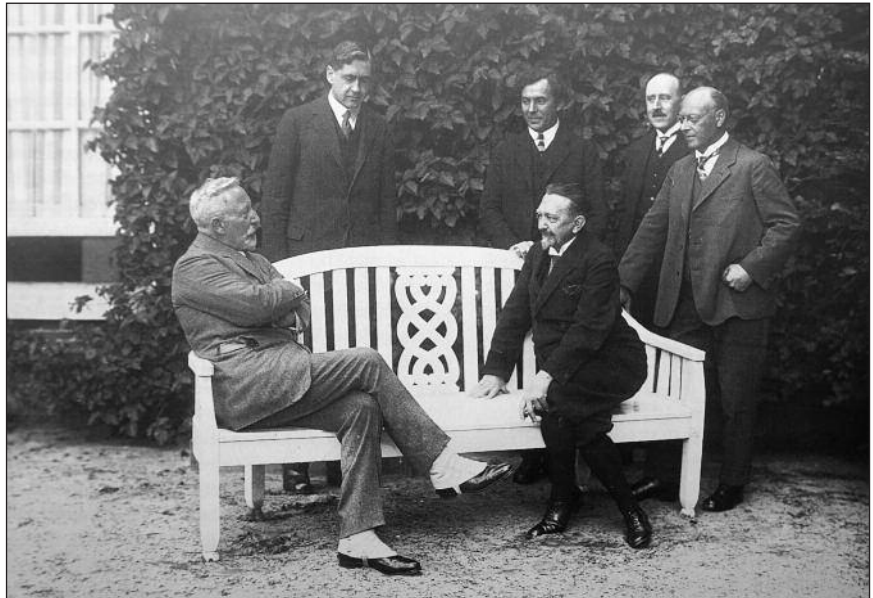


the former Crown Prince appeared in public at SA meetings, and spoke out for Hitler in the 1932 presidential elections. All three, and their brother Eitel Friedrich, were present at the 'Day of Postdam' on March 21, 1933 at which the new, Nazi-governed Reichstag was festively inaugurated.

Putting his hopes on the Nazi movement, if only for a short while, was the greatest error of judgement committed by the Kaiser during his years of exile. Once in power, Hitler had no use for the monarchists. This first became clear on February 3, 1934 when Hitler banned all monarchist organisations, and was confirmed the following August when, after the death of Weimar President Paul von Hindenburg, Hitler quickly proclaimed the amalgamation of the presidency and the chancellorship. From then on, Wilhelm realised that there was to be no restoration of the monarchy.

Meanwhile the Kaiser had found other things to keep him occupied. In 1931 he had founded the Doerner Arbeitsgemeinschaft (Doorn Study Group), which held annual conferences at which erudite papers were read on archaeology, the significance of symbols and associated theories. Perhaps meaningful, his own lecture at the 1934 conference delved into the history and meaning of the Swastika.

Although the Kaiser disapproved of racial persecution, paradoxically his own thoughts were deeply ingrained with a strong and unmistakable anti-Semitism. Throughout his exile, his letters to friends and relatives were full of ranting references to the 'the antichrist Jew'; to 'international Freemasonry-Jewry working towards world domination'; 'world Jewry' being responsible for the First World War; the war being



**In 1931, Wilhelm founded the Doerner Arbeitsgemeinschaft, a study circle that organised an annual conference at which erudite professors gave lectures on archaeology and associated subjects. Here the Kaiser (seated left) poses with Professor of Ethnography Leo Frobenius of Frankfurt University, who was one of his favourite scholars (right), and other members of the study group at House Doorn in 1935.**

won by 'Jewish-American money'; 'Juda-England' and so on. Also on numerous occasions he expressed a view that the Jews should be 'put out of the way', 'destroyed', even 'beaten to death'. Strangely enough, despite his wife's approval of the Nazis and

his own virulent anti-Semitism, he was appalled by the anti-Jewish violence of 'Kristallnacht' (Crystal Night) on the night of November 9/10, 1938, afterwards declaring: 'For the first time I am ashamed to be a German'.



There were several occasions during the long exile when the old grandeur returned to House Doorn. On May 4, 1938, there was the wedding of Prince Louis Ferdinand, the Crown Prince's second son, with Princess Kyra of Russia. This was the couple's third wedding ceremony. Two days before, on May 2, they were married in accordance with German civil law at Potsdam, followed by a Russian-Orthodox service in a church there. The ceremony at Doorn was a German Evangelical service.

Seated with the bride and bridegroom (in Luftwaffe uniform) is Grand Duke Kyril, father of the bride and head of the House of Romanov. Standing behind (L-R) are the ex-Kaiser (wearing the pre-war field-grey uniform of a general), Princess Hermine and the ex-Crown Prince. Among the guests were Princess Juliana of the Netherlands (seated on the carpet on Grand Duke Kyril's left) and her husband Prince Bernhard (standing fifth from left).

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On May 10, 1940, Nazi Germany invaded the Netherlands and four days later, on May 14, the first German troops reached Doorn. The ex-Kaiser was thrilled to see parties of German

officers appear at his house and welcomed them with obvious delight, completely forgetting how offensive this must be to the Dutch who had given him refuge all these years.

#### WAR COMES TO DOORN

When the Second World War began on September 3, 1939, a dozen Hohenzollern princes, including three of the Kaiser's grandsons, were serving in the armed forces, several of them at the front. Within two days, Prince Oskar, one of the Kaiser's grandsons (the eldest child of his fifth son Oskar), was killed fighting as an infantry lieutenant at Wadowka in Poland.

Wilhelm's loyalties at this time were divided. On the one hand, he felt events as a German but on the other he was also conscious that the war threatened his court-in-exile in Doorn and that he owed a debt to the Netherlands, which had afforded him sanctuary. His actions reflected his uncertainty. Through the German Ambassador in The Hague, he sent Hitler a message expressing relief that the Führer had survived the assassination attempt in Munich's Bürger-

bräukeller on November 8. Ten days later he sent Queen Wilhelmina a telegram of condolence after the Dutch passenger steamer *Simon Bolivar* had been sunk by German mines in the North Sea.

That same month the British Government found time to consider what would happen to its former *bête noir* in the event of a German invasion of Holland. The Ambassador in The Hague was instructed that, should the topic come up in conversation with the Dutch authorities, he should seek to get Wilhelm moved to Sweden or Denmark. However, nothing came of this.

The Dutch authorities discussed the same matter and it was agreed that, should Germany attack the Netherlands, the Kaiser and his retinue were to be immediately interned within the confines of House Doorn.

On May 10, Germany began the invasion of the West, and German divisions swept

into Holland. At 3.30 in the morning the sound of gun-fire was heard in Doorn as hundreds of German aircraft seemed to be following the line of the Waal river, down to western Holland (these were Ju 52 aircraft carrying parachute troops to Moerdijk, Rotterdam and The Hague). In Doorn was located the headquarters of the Dutch II Legerkorps, responsible for defending the central part of the front, and its main defence position, the Grebbeberg hill, lay just 20 kilometres east of the town (see *Blitzkrieg in the West Then and Now*).

At 5.30 a.m. the corps commander, Generaal-Majoor Jacob Harberts, instructed Kolonel (retired) Marius van Houten, chief of the Marechaussee (Dutch military police) and Rijksveldwacht (gendarmérie) detail responsible for the security of House Doorn, to proceed with the internment of the Kaiser and his entourage. At 7 a.m. van Houten



One officer, Oberstleutnant i.G. Horst von Zitzewitz, the Chief-of-Staff of the 207. Infanterie-Division, brought a directive from the Führer, stipulating that the former Kaiser and his entire household would 'enjoy the protection of the Wehrmacht'. This meant that the guarding and security of House Doorn, which



all these years had been the task of the Dutch police, was now taken over by a Wehrmacht unit, a platoon from Infanterie-Regiment 322 commanded by Leutnant Philip von Braunschweig being detailed for the assignment. Here the Kaiser watches the platoon forming up in front of the house.





**Leutnant von Braunschweig at the main gate. Behind him is the large gatehouse that the Kaiser had built before he moved into House Doorn in 1920. It included a guard-room (to the left of the arched entrance) but also offices and lodgings for members of the Kaiser's retinue.**

reached Doorn and duly informed the Kaiser. The German personnel was taken into custody and moved to a fort near Wijk bij Duurstede. All except three of the Dutch personnel also had to leave. Only seven of the Kaiser's servants were allowed to stay but everyone, including Wilhelm himself, had to sign a statement that they would not leave the estate. Radios were confiscated and all telephone lines cut. The main gate and all other entrances to the grounds were locked with chains and guards positioned all around.

Meanwhile, in London, Winston Churchill, who had just become Prime Minister that day, found time to think about the Kaiser and sent a message to the Foreign Office: 'Mr Churchill wonders whether it would not be a good thing to give the ex-Kaiser a private hint that he would be received with consideration and dignity in England should he desire to seek asylum here.' The proposal was approved by the Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, and by the King, and telegraphed to the ambassador in The Hague at 5.15 p.m. on the 11th. If Wilhelm accepted the offer, an RAF aircraft would fly to Holland within the next few hours and pick up the Kaiser and his wife.

The message was transmitted to the Burgomaster of Doorn, Baron Justinus van Nagell, who was a good friend of the Kaiser, on Sunday morning, May 12, and he immediately drove down to House Doorn to convey the communication. The Kaiser was still in bed but van Nagell was ushered into the room. Wilhelm was surprised by the offer and childishly pleased and his first inclination was to accept it. Empress Hermine was overjoyed and immediately began to pack her bags. Wilhelm asked for some time to think about the offer so van Nagell said he would return in one hour to hear his decision.

Upon reflection, Wilhelm decided to turn down the offer. He was a German and, whatever he thought of Hitler, he must support his country, right or wrong. He did not, as he told one of his adjutants, 'wish to grant the British the joy of drawing him into their chess game with Germany'. He would 'rather be shot by the Dutch than flee to England and had no wish to be photographed with Churchill'. When Baron van Nagell returned, Wilhelm asked him to convey to the British government his sincerest thanks, but that as he had been accused of running away once before, he would now stay where he was. Also, the Dutch people had been good to him during his long exile and he did not wish to desert them in their misfortune.

At 6.15 that evening the Foreign Office in London received a reply from the ambassador in The Hague: 'Offer of asylum gratefully declined'. The official excuse given was that his heart condition did not allow flying.

On May 13, after three days of bitter fighting, the Germans finally broke through the Grebbe Line defences. Early next morning, May 14, troops of the 207. Infanterie-Division entered Doorn and shortly before 8 a.m. Oberst Fritz Neidholt, commander of Infanterie-Regiment 322, with five officers from his staff, arrived at the gate of House Doorn and asked to see the Kaiser. Wilhelm was still in bed but, after a long wait, he appeared on the house steps, dressed in a blue costume with a straw hat and a walking stick. He immediately asked Neidholt about German casualties and was relieved to hear that they had been considerable but not too high. He handed out autographed portraits. Empress Hermine came outside and the party presented her with a bouquet of flowers. She later recorded: 'The expression of the Kaiser, as he stood with the regimental commander

on the front steps, looking 30 years younger, will remain with me as unforgettable.'

An hour later, another officer arrived, Oberstleutnant i.G. Horst von Zitzewitz, the Ia (Chief-of-Staff) of the 207. Division. He carried special instructions from the Führer himself, which he read out to Wilhelm at the house steps: '(1) The former Kaiser and his entire household enjoy the protection of the Wehrmacht like any other German citizen. (2) House Doorn and its close surroundings will not be billeted with or disturbed by German troops. (3) The Geheime Feldpolizei (Secret Field Police) will for the time being take over protection and security of House Doorn and the entire imperial household. Until they arrive the Wehrmacht will take care of the cordoning-off.'

When asked by von Zitzewitz if he wished to move his residence back to Germany, the Kaiser replied that he preferred to stay in Doorn. He said he loved the house, the park, his flowers, and would like to spend the last years of his life there. If the military situation required him to move, he would prefer to temporarily stay at House Amerongen. Von Zitzewitz reassured the Kaiser there was probably no need for that. (The Dutch Army capitulated later that day.)

Although all of this sounded positive, the reality proved to be not so good. The Wehrmacht detail assigned to protect Doorn — a platoon from Infanterie-Regiment 322 commanded by Leutnant Philip von Braunschweig — was quickly replaced by an SS detachment and it soon became clear that they were actually there to guard the Kaiser and prevent him from leaving the estate. In effect, the Kaiser was interned in his own home. The guards were given strict orders not to fraternise but Wilhelm's quiet courtesy and dignified demeanour quickly charmed them. Even their commander was soon snapping to attention, saluting and addressing the Kaiser as 'His Majesty'.

Although contacts were forbidden, many a German officer and delegations of soldiers succeeded in paying House Doorn a visit. Wilhelm immensely enjoyed these contacts, fondly handing out autographed portrait photos to his visitors. However, the Kaiser found that the younger generation of Germans had already largely forgotten him. One day, strolling the woods at Amerongen, he came upon a young sentry guarding a depot. The soldier answered his questions



**The gatehouse and main entrance on Langbroekerweg remain unchanged.**

ATB (D)



**Right: On June 17, 1940 — just over a month after the Dutch capitulation — Wilhelm visited the military cemetery on the Grebbeberg hill, 20 kilometres east of Doorn. The hill had seen fierce fighting, being one of the positions where the Dutch army had put up its strongest resistance, and losses on both sides had been heavy. The cemetery, which had just been opened, contained the dead of both armies.**

seemingly at ease and without any reverence, clearly unaware of whom he was talking to. 'Youth has now forgotten me too', Wilhelm despondently told his retinue on his return home.

On May 23, Prince Wilhelm, the Crown Prince's son and the Kaiser's eldest grandson, who served in the 1. Infanterie-Division, was severely wounded in the fighting near Valenciennes and he died in a military hospital three days later. His body was sent back to Potsdam and he was buried on May 29 in the Hohenzollern Mausoleum in the Antique Temple in the Sanssouci Park. A huge crowd of some 50,000 people thronged to his funeral service, the Crown Prince was there, and it became the largest monarchist demonstration since the Kaiser's abdication. Hitler was incensed and ordered that all members of the House of Hohenzollern were immediately to be dismissed from the Wehrmacht and accept civilian employment. There were rumours that he also intended taking severe reprisals against them and their families.

Nonetheless, the Kaiser followed the progress of the war in the West with avid interest, great pride and enthusiasm. In his opinion, 'the brilliant leading generals in this war come from *my* school, they fought under *my* command in the world war as lieutenants, captains or young majors.' He was profoundly stirred by the rapid victory in France. On June 17, three days after German troops entered Paris, he sent Hitler a telegram of congratulations: 'Deeply impressed by France's laying down of arms, I congratulate you and the entire German Wehrmacht on the divinely bestowed enormous victory with the words of Kaiser Wilhelm the Great: "Through God's merciful dispensation, what a change of fortune!" In all German hearts sounds the hymn of Leuthen, which the victors of Leuthen, the Great King's soldiers, sang: Now thank we all our God.' (Leuthen was a victory won by Frederick the Great in 1757 during the Seven Years War).

The telegram was an impetuous but inept gesture, a serious mistake, and there has been much debate since on what may have prompted the Kaiser to send it. Some say it was instigated by Wilhelm von Dommes, the



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**Today the Military Cemetery of Honour Grebbeberg outside the village of Rhenen contains only Dutch graves, the German dead having all been transferred to the German Military Cemetery at Ysselstein in the south of the country in 1947. Originally there were 400 Dutch soldiers interred on the Grebbeberg but others have been brought to the cemetery since 1946 so that today there are over 850 buried there.**

Kaiser's House Minister (he had succeeded von Kleist in 1931), who thought a conciliatory gesture was necessary to placate Hitler after the furore over the monarchist demonstration at Potsdam of the previous month.

Others claim it was under pressure from his wife Hermine, who saw it as another chance to ingratiate her husband with the Nazi leader. Hitler sent a letter of thanks on the 25th, and both the Kaiser's telegram and the Führer's reply were published in all German newspapers. (Whatever lay behind it, when after the war the telegram became known in the Netherlands, it caused much resentment and led the Dutch government to impound House Doorn and all its contents).

On the same day that Wilhelm sent the telegram to Hitler, June 17, he visited the newly-created cemetery of honour on the Grebbeberg, paying his respects to the fallen soldiers of both armies, German and Dutch. It was to be the last time he left House Doorn.

**Left: On October 10, 1940, there occurred the last festive event at house Doorn when Princess Henriette von Schönai-ChCarolath, Hermine's youngest daughter ('the general', by now 21 years old), married one of the Kaiser's grandsons, Prince Karl Franz (then serving as a lieutenant in a panzer division and already a veteran of the Polish campaign). Standing behind the Kaiser (third from right, wearing his chain of office) is Baron Justinus van Nagell, the mayor of Doorn, who confirmed the civil marriage.**





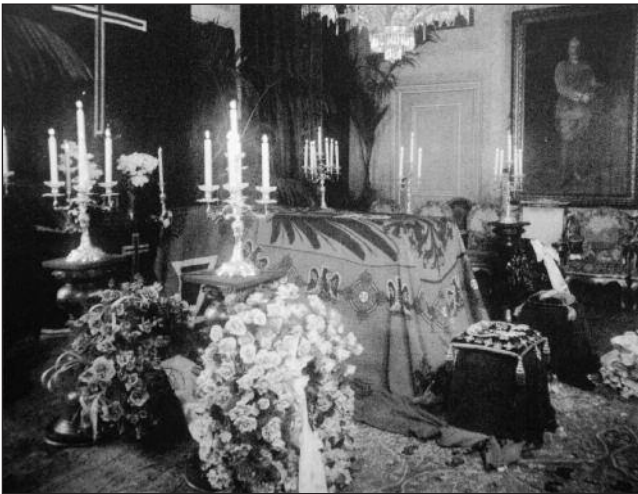
## DEATH OF THE KAISER

The Kaiser lived for one more year. On October 1, 1940, there was a last festive occasion at House Doorn when Princess Henriette von Schönau-Carolath, Hermine's youngest daughter, married one of the Kaiser's grandsons, Prince Karl Franz (the son of Prince Joachim who had committed suicide in 1920). Baron van Nagell confirmed the civil marriage. The church wedding took place at Potsdam on October 5.

By now Wilhelm was rapidly growing old and during the spring of 1941 he began to feel unwell. His heart had been erratic from angina pectoris since early 1938 and for some time now he had had trouble with his stomach. On March 1, as he was wood-cutting in the park, he suffered a collapse, which decidedly weakened him, and he spent more time in bed or in a wheelchair. In the last week of May, a cold turned to pneumonia and gradually it became clear that he would not recover. He lay in his bed, barely conscious but restful. His children gathered at Doorn but when he seemed to rally slightly they



On June 4, 1941, ex-Kaiser Wilhelm died at House Doorn at the age of 82.



Left: He lay in state in the dining room on the ground floor, his coffin draped with the Imperial flag. Displayed in front are his



field-marshal's baton and main decorations. Right: The same room today, with a different portrait of Wilhelm on the wall.



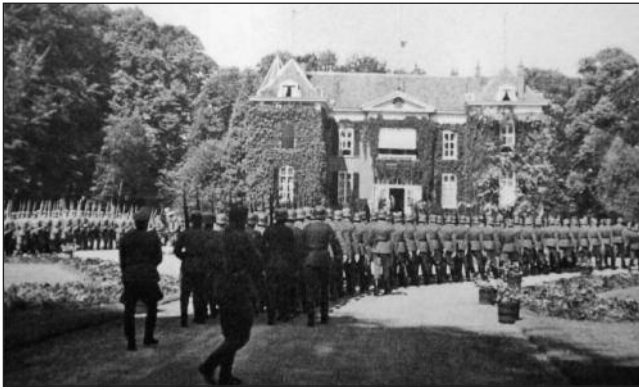
The ex-Kaiser was to be buried in the grounds of House Doorn. A special mausoleum was planned to be built but until that was ready he would be temporarily laid to rest in the estate's small chapel. [1] Original main road entrance. [2] New entrance and gatehouse. [3] The House. [4] Orangery. [5] Wood-cutting shed. [6] Chapel. [7] Mausoleum.

departed again, only his daughter Viktoria Louise (the Duchess of Brunswick) staying on with her two children.

On the morning of June 3, he was fit enough to rejoice over the German capture of Crete, exclaiming 'That's wonderful! Our glorious troops!' However, later that day, a clot of blood developed on his lung and, suffering acute lack of breath and heavy chest pains, he cried out to his nurse: 'I am reaching the end, I am sinking, I am sinking!' That evening, after having calmly said goodbye to his wife, daughter, stepdaughter Henriette and grandsons Louis Ferdinand and Franz Josef, he lapsed into a coma from which he never emerged. He died at 12.30 the following afternoon, Wednesday June 4, in the presence of his wife and daughter. He had lived to 82.

Thus passed away the man who had been the symbol of German imperialism and aggression in the First World War. The news of the Kaiser's death caused scarcely a ripple of interest, either in Germany or Britain. In accordance with instructions laid down by Propaganda Minister Josef Goebbels back in 1933 the German papers gave the news of Wilhelm's death 'with single-column headlines on the lower half of the front page'. In his own newspaper *Das Reich* Goebbels described the Kaiser as: 'one who only floated on the highest crest of a rolling surf, a floating particle, a distinguished particle to be sure, but nothing more.' In London, *The Times* curtly described him as 'a man essentially weak, a leader only by accident, set at the head of forces which he could stimulate but not control.'





**Left:** The funeral took place on Monday, June 9. Despite Wilhelm's wishes for a sober ceremony without much pomp, he was given a grand military funeral. Here the special Ehren-Bataillon (Battalion of Honour) comprising a company each



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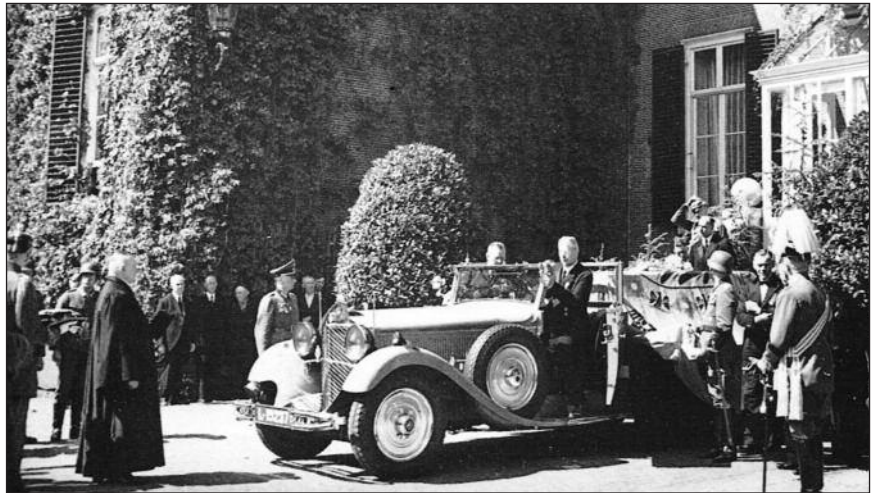
from the Heer, Kriegsmarine and Luftwaffe, marches into the forecourt. The Kaiser's bedroom, where he had died, is the one on the left on the first floor. **Right:** The ivy has gone but otherwise House Doorn remains largely as it was in 1940.

### THE FUNERAL

Eight years before, at Christmas 1933, Wilhelm had prepared elaborate directions for his burial: if he returned to Germany during his lifetime, he was to be laid to rest in the family mausoleum in Potsdam; if he died in exile, he was to be entombed in a mausoleum in the Doorn grounds. He wanted a sober ceremony, quiet and dignified, without speeches or wreaths and without deputations from Germany. In no case was there to be any display of Swastika flags.

However, it was not to be. Hitler (who had been kept informed of the Kaiser's approaching end) initially insisted that he be given a state funeral in Potsdam, no doubt intending to himself walk behind the coffin so as to legitimise himself before the eyes of the world as the sole and rightful successor of the Hohenzollerns. However, many of Hitler's associates counselled against such a move. In particular Goebbels advised against it, arguing that there was still a lot of resentment against the old Kaiser in Germany, particularly in Communists and Socialist circles (which, in his function as Gauleiter of Berlin, he was still trying to win over to the Nazi cause); also the Monarchist movement, still strong among the officer corps and nobility, would not like seeing their Kaiser being honoured by the Nazis.

Realising that his original plan was unwise, on May 29 — a full six days before the Kaiser's death — Hitler ordered that the funeral be organised by the German authorities in the occupied Netherlands 'with cool observance of outer decency'. It was to be a



**One of the Kaiser's cars, the 1931 Mercedes-Benz F 770K Cabriolet (L-15237), had been specially converted to serve as a hearse, its rear body having been taken off and replaced by a platform. Here the coffin has just been placed onto it. Standing in front of the car is Pastor Bruno Doehring who led the funeral service.**

military event, with an Army band and a guard of honour. Arthur Seyss-Inquart, the German Reichskommissar governing the occupied Netherlands, was to represent the Führer, and lay a wreath on his behalf, and there would be wreaths from the commanders-in-chief of the three branches of the Wehrmacht. Thirty officers of the former

Imperial Army were given permission to attend the funeral.

In a series of telephone conversations with the Reichskanzlei in Berlin and the 'Wolfschanze' Führerhauptquartier, Flügel-Adjutant (Wing Adjutant) Alexander Freiherr von Grancy-Senarclens, Wilhelm's confidential agent in Germany, negotiated a compromise.



**Above:** Despite the Kaiser's explicit wish that there should be no Swastikas at his funeral, this was swept aside by Hitler and there were several in evidence, such as this one on the wreath from the Oberbefehlshaber des Heeres (Commander-in-Chief of the Army), Generalfeldmarschall Walther von Brauchitsch. **Right:** Hitler himself had sent a huge wreath which was so large and heavy that it had to be carried by four men.

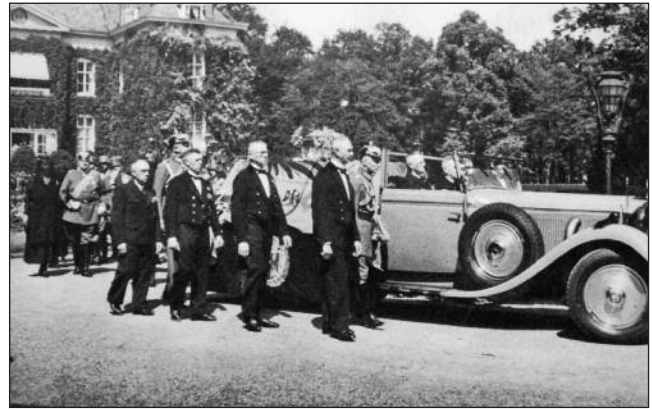


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Generalmajor Karl Count von der Goltz (left) and Detlev Count von Moltke (right), two of the Kaiser's adjutants, walk ahead of the hearse carrying his field-marshal's baton and decorations. Pastor Doehring follows behind.



Walking alongside the hearse were eight house servants and four of the Kaiser's adjutants — Wilhelm von Dommies, Friedrich Mewes, Ulrich von Sell and Sigurd von Ilsemann — the latter each holding a corner of the Imperial flag.



Immediately behind came the Royal family, led by Crown Prince Wilhelm escorting his stepmother Princess Hermine (in black veil), followed by Prince Eitel Friedrich with Crown Princess Cecilia and Prince Adalbert with his sister Princess Viktoria Louise.



The bridge across the moat remains but the grass circle in front of the house, where in 1941 many wreaths were laid out, has gone, the path today leading around the edges of the front lawn.

As it evolved, Wilhelm's wishes as to his funeral were only very partially observed: on the one hand the ceremony was kept sober and there were no speeches but on the other there was a sizable deputation from Germany, there were many wreaths, and the Swastika appeared on Hitler's wreath and on the uniforms of several high officers present.

One important item had already been arranged. Back in 1937, the Kaiser had himself bought a coffin, made of four-centimetre-thick oak wood, with a lead inner lining and fitted with a silk bed and a pillow embroidered with the Hohenzollern coat of arms. Designed by German sculptor Max Bezner, it weighed 50 kilos and cost 1,035 Dutch guilders.

Commissioned to organise the funeral was the undertaking firm of Innemee from The Hague, the final cost being 1,475 Dutch guilders. A detailed plan was drawn up, giving a time schedule, seating arrangements, the order of march of the cortege, the musical programme to be played by the military band, etc. The body of the Kaiser would be laid in state in House Doorn's dining hall on the ground floor, the coffin draped with the Imperial flag. The mourning service would be led by Pastor Bruno Doehring, parson of Berlin cathedral and house chaplain of the Hohenzollerns who had visited Doorn annually to preach a birthday sermon. As the mausoleum, planned north of the main house, still had to be built, the Kaiser's body would be temporarily laid to rest in the small chapel that stood near the entrance to the estate.

A special train — Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop's Sonderzug — was made available to convey the German guests

to the Netherlands. Aboard were numerous members of the Hohenzollern family and generals and admirals from both the old and new German armies with their aides-de-camp. Leading the deputation from the old

Imperial Army was 91-year-old Generalfeldmarschall August von Mackensen, the celebrated victor of the Eastern Front in the Great War. Others were General der Infanterie Carl-Heinrich von Stülpnagel, General



Behind the Royal family came Reichskommissar Arthur Seyss-Inquart, Nazi governor of the occupied Netherlands, flanked by 91-year-old Generalfeldmarschall August von Mackensen. Following were the four representatives of the armed forces: (L-R) Admiral Wilhelm Canaris for the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OKW); General der Flieger Friedrich Christiansen for the Luftwaffe; Admiral Hermann Densch for the Kriegsmarine, and Generaloberst Paul von Hase for the Heer.

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Slowly, with drums rolling, the cortege proceeded across the estate grounds. This picture was taken by press photographer Emil Smetanic-Klinsky from Amsterdam who before the war

worked for the German press agency Deutscher Verlag and the Berlin branch of Associated Press, and during the occupation for the Nazified agencies Transatlantic and Presse Bild Zentrale.

der Infanterie Walther Reinhardt, General der Infanterie Hasse, General der Artillerie von Behrend, Generalleutnant Karl von Fabek and Admirals Ludwig von Reuter and Wilhelm von Lans. There were also generals from the Bulgarian and Hungarian armies. Of the high-ranking officers selected to represent the armed forces, three also travelled to Holland in the special train: Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, the chief of the Foreign Branch of the Abwehr (Military Intelligence Service), who was to represent the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OKW, Armed Forces High Command); Generaloberst Paul von Hase, Kommandant of the Berlin garrison, who was to represent the Army; and Admiral Hermann Densch, commanding the Marinestation der Ostsee (Baltic Sea Naval Station), who was to deputise for the Kriegsmarine. All three had been selected for a special reason: Canaris had been a celebrated U-Boat commander in the First World War, and was a favourite of the Kaiser; von Hase had previously commanded the 56. Infan-

terie-Division, which had partaken in the invasion of Holland in May 1940, and Densch had been commander of a torpedo boat flotilla in the 1914-18 war and had been awarded with the Knight's Cross of the House Order of Hohenzollern.

Departing from Berlin's Potsdamer Bahnhof at 7.10 p.m. on Sunday, June 8, the special train halted at Potsdam to pick up most of the members of the Royal family and then travelled overnight to Holland, arriving at Utrecht central station at 7 a.m. the following morning, June 9. The members of the Royal family were driven to Doorn in several cars, the rest of the guests following at 9.45 in ten other motor vehicles. Arriving at House Doorn, they were received by one of the Kaiser's adjutants, Major Ulrich Freiherr von Sell, everyone assembling in the main house.

Already on display, inside the house and on the lawn in front, were the dozens of wreaths and floral pieces that had been sent, including ones from the Danish and Swedish

royal houses, the Hungarian regent Admiral Miklós Horthy, the Dutch Marechaussee, the Dutch Reformed Church community of Doorn, the Order of St John's Hospital in Amerongen and from numerous inhabitants of Doorn. On the grass circle in front of the house, the municipal citizens had laid out a flowerbed representing an ermine mantle with a golden cross.

At 10.30, Reichskommissar Seyss-Inquart arrived. He was accompanied by several of his high functionaries, including SS-Obergruppenführer Hanss Rauter, the Höhere SS- und Polizeiführer (Higher SS and Police Leader) in occupied Holland, who was there to represent Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler; Dr Otto Bene, representative of the German Foreign Office in the occupied Netherlands, and Landrat Dr Arthur Joachim, the German plenipotentiary for the province of Utrecht. They were received at the gatehouse by one of the Kaiser's adjutants, Oberst Eberhardt von Giese, who escorted them first to the Crown Prince and



Walking ahead of the hearse were soldiers carrying seven large wreaths, the last and largest being that from Hitler.



Today just a quiet path across the grounds, with House Doorn just visible through the trees.



**Right:** The funeral procession on its way to the small chapel. In front are (L-R) Princess Hermine and Crown Prince Wilhelm; in the second row Crown Princess Cecilia, Prince Eitel Friedrich, Princess Viktoria Louise and Prince Adalbert; in the third Prince Oskar, Princess Heinrich (Irene von Hessen, widow of the Kaiser's eldest brother), Countess Margarete von Hessen (the Kaiser's last surviving sister) and Prince August Wilhelm.

then to Empress Hermine to express their sympathies. The Reichskommissar had brought two wreaths, a personal one and a huge tribute from the Führer.

Arriving with Seyss-Inquart was the man who, together with Generaloberst von Hase and Admirals Canaris and Densch, was to represent the commanders-in-chief of the armed forces: General der Flieger Friedrich Christiansen, the Wehrmachtbefehlshaber in den besetzten Niederlanden (Armed Forces Commander in the Occupied Netherlands). A famous naval pilot from the First World War, decorated with the Pour le Mérite by the Kaiser in 1917, he was to represent the C-in-C of the Luftwaffe, Reichsmarschall Göring.

At 10.45, a special Ehren-Bataillon (Battalion of Honour), comprising a band and a company each from the Heer, Luftwaffe and Kriegsmarine, and commanded by Oberst



Rudolf-Christoph Freiherr von Gersdorff (one of Mackensen's former ADCs),

up formation on either side of the forecourt. At 10.55, Adjutant von Grancy-Senarclens led the members of the Royal family to their

**Right:** In the next section were Seyss-Inquart, von Mackensen and Generaloberst von Hase, followed by Admiral Canaris, General Christiansen and Admiral Densch. It is remarkable how many of the high officers present at the funeral later became involved in the July 20, 1944 plot to kill Hitler, most of them then also falling victim to the subsequent reprisals. Generaloberst Von Hase, who was Stadtkommandant of Berlin on the day of the attempt, was arrested that same evening, sentenced to death by the People's Court on August 8, 1944 and hanged at Plötzensee Prison that same day; Admiral Canaris was arrested on July 23 and hanged at Flossenbürg concentration camp on April 9, 1945; and Carl-Heinrich von Stülpnagel, then Wehrmachtbefehlshaber in France, was arrested, convicted and executed at Plötzensee on August 30, 1944. Only Rudolf-Christoph Freiherr von Gersdorff (the commander of the Ehren-Bataillon), who had attempted to assassinate Hitler by suicide bombing at the Zeughaus in Berlin on March 21, 1943, escaped arrest, becoming one of the few military anti-Hitler plotters to survive the war.



seats, to the right of the coffin, while Adjutant von Giese showed Seyss-Inquart to his place, and Adjutants Alfred Niemann and Major Louis von Müldner did the same with Generalfeldmarschall von Mackensen and the military representatives, all of them seated on the left. The remaining guests were seated in the vestibule. The space around the coffin was already filled to capacity with floral tributes, so the large wreaths of the C-in-Cs of the armed forces, as soon as they had been

**Left:** Splendid in their white uniform tunics were the representatives of the Hungarian and Bulgarian armies. Towering high in the third row (fifth from right) is SS-Obergruppenführer Hanss Rauter, the Höhere SS- und Polizeiführer in the occupied Netherlands (who four years later would be assassinated by the Dutch resistance — see *After the Battle* No. 56). According to the official programme, his assigned position in the cortege was further up front, alongside Reichskommissar Seyss-Inquart, but this place was given up in favour of Generalfeldmarschall von Mackensen. This picture is one of several taken by SS-Kriegsberichtler Hans Fritz.

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**Above: The mourners assembling at the chapel. Second from left is Prince Louis Ferdinand (who had married at Doorn three years earlier) and standing to his left are Princesses Viktoria Louise and Hermine, the Crown Prince, Seyss-Inquart and von Mackensen. Right: The view is back towards the path along which the cortege arrived at the chapel. Note the pigeon-loft on the lawn through the trees in the background.**

placed, were carried outside to make room for the next ones. Only Hitler's wreath, carried in by four men, was left in place.

At 11.00 the official ceremony began with a short service conducted by Pastor Doehring and comprising a hymn accompanied by a pump organ, the reading of several verses from the Bible (selected by the Kaiser himself), a prayer and another hymn.

Following this, the house personnel, led by chamber servants Friedrich Prawitt and Wilhelm Fernau, carried the coffin down the front steps, and onto the Kaiser's Mercedes-Benz F 770K Cabriolet, which had been specially modified to serve as a hearse. As the coffin came outside, the battalion of honour presented arms, while the band sounded a drum roll before playing the hymn *Jesus meine Zuversicht* . . . (Jesus Christ, my sure Defence). As soon as the coffin was on the hearse, the battalion marched off, the band playing two more hymns, *Wenn ich einmal soll scheiden* . . . (When I must Die) and *Harre meine Seele* . . . (Trust patiently, my Soul)

As the battalion marched off, the cortege formed up. Leading the procession was Konteradmiral Theodor Eschenburg, one of the Kaiser's senior adjutants. Then came seven large wreaths, each one carried by two Wehrmacht soldiers, those of Empress Hermine and the Crown Prince coming first and that of Hitler (with its four bearers) bringing up the rear. Behind the wreaths came two adjutants, Generalmajor Karl Count von der Goltz carrying the Kaiser's field-marshal's baton and Detlev Count von Moltke carrying the Kaiser's decorations, and Pastor Doehring. Then came the coffin on its hearse, escorted on each side by four house servants and with the four corners of the Imperial flag held by four more of the Kaiser's adjutants, Wilhelm von Dommes, Friedrich Mewes, Ulrich von Sell and Sigurd von Ilseemann.

The procession behind the hearse was divided up into four distinct sections. First came Empress Hermine and the Crown Prince, followed by 33 other members of the

Hohenzollern family, including Wilhelm's other surviving sons Eitel Friedrich, August Wilhelm, Oskar and Adalbert and their wives; his daughter Viktoria Louise and her husband, and numerous grandchildren. Then came the deputation from the Nazi government: Seyss-Inquart, with Rauter, Bene and Joachim. Next came the military contingent: von Mackensen, with the representatives of the Wehrmacht — Generals Hase and Christiansen and Admirals Densch and Canaris — and those of the old Imperial Army and Navy. Finally, the others mourners, many of them Dutch dignitaries. (As the procession formed up, there occurred a few impromptu deviations from the official line-up: Mackensen and his ADC moved forward, taking a place next to Seyss-Inquart; and Rauter, Bene and Joachim moved back, taking up position amid the group of old Reichsheer officers. No doubt the initiative of Seyss-Inquart, whether these changes were just out of reverence to the old field-marshal or out of political design is hard to tell.)

With all formed up, the procession began its slow march from the house to the chapel near the entrance of the park, a distance of some 250 metres. Crossing the moat bridge,



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**Left: Count von Moltke (left) and Count von der Goltz (right) present the Kaiser's field-marshal's baton and decorations while Pastor Doehring leads in prayer from the chapel door. Right: The two steps at the chapel entrance necessitated the addition of the low ramp seen in the wartime photo.**



ATB



the column marched right around the grass circle in front of the house and proceeded between the trees to the track that led across the open lawns, past the pigeon-loft, to the copse near the gate that hid the chapel. A newsreel cameraman and several official photographers were present, recording the slow, dignified march through the park.

As the head of the Ehren-Bataillon reached the turn-off to the chapel, it halted and formed up along the main path, allowing the cortege to move past. At the turn-off, hearse stopped, the coffin was taken off, carried the last few metres to the chapel, and with drums beating and trumpets sounding, carried inside. The band started the hymn *Eine feste Burg ist unser Gott* . . . (A Mighty Fortress Is Our God) and the congregation joined by singing the first two verses.

Pastor Doehring then gave the benediction and led in prayer. Taking a golden plate filled with German soil brought especially from the Sanssouci Park in Potsdam, he scattered the earth out over the coffin. Wreaths were then laid, the large ones being placed outside the chapel on either side of the entrance. Seyss-Inquart, having laid Hitler's wreath, gave the Nazi salute.

One incident remained in everybody's memory: entering the small chapel, the aged Generalfeldmarschall von Mackensen, splendid in his old Hussars uniform and high fur cap and wearing orders and ribbons dating back to 1870, raised his field-marshal's baton and then, supported by his sword, knelt unaided beside the catafalque, silent in prayer. It was noticed he was in tears.

The Kaiser's four sons then took up the death watch. The band played another hymn, *Ich bete an die Macht der Liebe* . . . (I Pray to the Power of Love) and the Ehren-Bataillon then concluded the ceremony by firing three shots as a final salute. They then marched off under the sound of the *Yorckscher Marsch*.



**Left: Generaloberst von Hase lends a hand to von Mackensen as he emerges from the chapel, obviously moved by the passing of his old commander-in-chief. Right: While von Mackensen and Hase give the traditional military salute of the old Imperial Army, Seyss-Inquart raises his arm for the Nazi greeting.**

The ceremony over, the Empress and Crown Prince returned to the house to receive the condolences of the guests.

It had been a dignified ceremony, strangely lacking in pomp. No funeral oration; no tolling of cathedral bells; no sombre

music, only hymns and the sound of the *Yorckscher Marsch*; no minute guns firing salute salvos, only a volley fired by riflemen. Sigurd von Ilsemann described it in his diary as 'simple, militarily short, Prussian business-like and yet full of high dignity'.



**The flower-bedecked coffin inside the chapel, with the larger wreaths — that of Hitler on the left — placed outside.**

NID 30024





The ceremony over, the grass in front of the chapel is bedecked with dozens of wreaths and floral tributes.



After the war, with House Doorn turned into a museum, the chapel served for a time as its souvenir shop. Today it stands unused.



On June 4, 1942 — one year to the day after the demise of the ex-Kaiser — his remains were transferred to the small mausoleum that had been newly built in the grounds of House Doorn, and this is where they remain to this day.

#### AFTERMATH

Completion of the permanent mausoleum took several months. Designed by the Berlin architect Martin Kiessling, it was a simple limestone neoclassical building, its main decoration being a small coat of arms above the door. On June 4, 1942 — exactly one year after the Kaiser's death — his sarcophagi was transferred to its new abode.

By then, his widow no longer lived in Doorn. In August 1941 Princess Hermine returned to Schloss Saabor, her family castle in Lower Silesia, where she remained for the rest of the war. (Arrested by the Soviet occupation authorities in 1945, she was interned in Frankfurt-an-der-Oder and died there on August 7, 1947, aged 59).

House Doorn was left in possession of the Crown Prince, who dissolved the household, leaving the Kaiser's faithful adjutant, Sigurd von Ilsemann (who in 1920 had married a daughter of Count Bentinck and had decided to stay in Holland) as its caretaker. Put under special protection 'due to the high cultural value of the collections held there', and in consultation with the (Nazi-controlled) Dutch Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, a decision was taken to turn the house into a museum. German sentries still guarded the estate but from February 25, 1942 until the end of the war, small parties of mostly Dutch civilians were allowed to visit the house and admire its wealth.

After the war, House Doorn and all the Kaiser's possessions were appropriated by the Dutch state. Since then, the house with



all its unique riches and treasures has served as a museum, visited by tens of thousands every year. Run since 1953 by a special foundation, over the years it has been confronted with budget cuts, threats of closure and other problems but each time the museum survived and emerged stronger. In 2014 it opened a new permanent exhibition on the Netherlands in the First World War, housed in the estate's former garage building, especially enlarged with a glass extension.

*Left:* After the death of her husband, ex-Kaiserine Hermine returned to her family castle at Saabor in Lower Silesia. In early 1945, she fled westwards before the Russian advance and went to stay with her younger sister who lived at the town of Rossla in the Harz Mountains, 50 kilometres west of Leipzig. This picture of her walking with her niece Princess Carmo Hartung and the latter's two-year-old son, Prince Franz Josef of Prussia, was taken there on April 24, 1945 after she had been detained by troops of the US 104th Infantry Division. This part of Germany later fell under the Soviet zone of occupation and the Russians soon interned Hermine in Frankfurt-an-der-Oder where she died on August 7, 1947, aged 59. Despite her wish to be entombed in Doorn, she was buried in Potsdam.