



In this sequel to Campaign in Britain, 1940-41, Field Marshal Horst von Halen recounts his part in the war against Russia and in plotting to remove Hitler from power in WWII.

**DECISION AT THE WOLF'S LAIR:
An Alternate History Novel**

By Anthony Genualdi

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ANTHONY GENUALDI



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the Wolf's Lair***

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This book is a work of fiction. It mentions some incidents of World War II, and some real historical figures and places but, for the most part, are changed to remove any resemblance to anyone living or dead.

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CHAPTER ONE:

From Gatwick to Tempelhof

On 22 August 1941, I left my occupation duty in England to return to Berlin. My old friend, Field Marshal von Brauchitsch, had suffered a heart attack and had to be relieved as chief of the *Oberkommando des Heeres*, or OKH. I would now go home to take his place.

My secretary, Inga, shook me from my nap. The plane ride from Gatwick Airfield, London, to Tempelhof Airfield, Berlin, wasn't very long, but I needed to sleep anyway. "*Herr Feldmarschall*," Inga said, "it's almost time."

"Thank you, *Fraulein* Inga." I looked to the seat at my right. My helmet, cap, and everyday field marshal's baton, the *interimstab*, were there.

"Remember," Inga said, "Field Marshal Keitel said you must wear the cap. The *Fuehrer* says you're not in the field anymore."

I nodded. "Thank you, *Fraulein*." I preferred my helmet ever since I was a lieutenant. One doesn't stand out so easily in the field in a helmet. But of course, as a general, then a field marshal, one stays in the rear, and wears a cap, no matter how one's ears look. I put the cap on and took my *interimstab*, then turned to Inga. "Do I look presentable?" I asked.

Inga looked me over and picked a couple pieces of lint away. "You do, *Herr Feldmarschall*."

“*Danke.*” Our plane touched down and I looked out to see a massive crowd on the field. The police strained to keep everyone back. They had come to see me, the “Conqueror of Britain,” as I had come home to serve the *Fuehrer* and Fatherland again in the war in the east.

The plane taxied over to the hangar where Hitler and Keitel were waiting, along with many other big names and faces. If the Russians had a bomber that could reach us, I thought, they could have ended it all right there. The plane stopped, steps were brought up, and the door opened. I let Inga step out first. When she got to the bottom of the steps, she stepped aside and turned. As I stepped out, the honor guard raised their rifles in salute, and Inga saluted. I raised my baton to return the salute as the crowd cheered.

From across the taxiway, Field Marshal Keitel walked to meet me. We met in the middle of the strip, saluted, and shook hands. Keitel gave me the smile a lackey always gives. “Horst, it’s good to have you home.”

“It’s good to be home, Wilhelm. Were you able to get my family here?” Keitel turned and pointed. Elsa was there, smiling and waving. My children, Irma and Sebald, were with her, beaming and waving at me. I waved back and said to Keitel, “Thank you, Wilhelm. This means a lot to me.”

Keitel smiled and nodded, then said, “Come on, Horst, he’s waiting.” He did an about face and I followed him forward. We went up the steps to where Hitler awaited us. The newsreel cameras whirred as Keitel raised his baton and Hitler raised his arm. “My *Fuehrer*, Field Marshal von Halen, Conqueror of Britain, has returned.” He stepped aside and I stepped up.

I raised my baton. “My *Fuehrer*, Field Marshal Horst von Halen reports from duty in Britain to you, and the Fatherland.”

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Hitler returned my salute and we shook hands. "It's wonderful to have you back, von Halen. The Fatherland and I thank you for your service." We both turned to face the crowd. They cheered as Hitler stepped up to the microphone, then hushed as he spoke. I quite honestly don't recall all of what he said. It was mostly the old *spiel* about how we had wanted peace, but Britain and Churchill did not, and how we brought the war to their island and taught them a lesson. We also had Churchill and found him guilty of crimes against peace. He was going to be executed and we would show it for all the world to see. We were also going to continue smashing the Bolsheviks in Russia and get the "living space" it was our destiny to achieve.

When Hitler was done talking, he left to a thunderous ovation and I turned to see my family. We ran to each other and I embraced and kissed my children and my wife. Elsa was first. "My *Liebchen*, how are you?"

"Oh, Horst. I'm glad you're home. Are you getting any leave?"

"I don't think so. But we'll be together for at least most of a day. I talked to Keitel about it before I flew here." My son was next. Sebald was in his Hitler Youth uniform. I hugged him. "How's my boy?"

"Hello, Papa. I'm happy you're home, too."

"Have you been obeying your mama?"

"Yes, Papa."

"How old are you now?"

Sebald laughed. "You know I'm nine, Papa."

"It's just that you're so big." I turned to my daughter next, in her League of German Girls uniform. "Look at you, Irma. How old are you?"

"I'm twelve, Papa. You know that." She laughed as we embraced.

Later, we were at the hotel having dinner. I noticed a strange box against the wall across from me. It had a newsreel going on it with sound. Our waiter approached. "Is everything all right, *Herr Feldmarschall*?"

I pointed at the box. "What is that thing?"

"It's a television, *Herr Feldmarschall*."

"Oh! I heard about that. When I was in England, I heard they had this. They had a football game on when war was declared, and they stopped the broadcast because they thought our bombers would home in on it."

"When we show football on Saturdays," the waiter replied, "we steal the patrons from the bar down the street. They only have a radio."

I chuckled. "Wait 'til they get a television. No one will leave." We both laughed.

The waiter looked to my family. "Is everything all right?"

The children nodded and Elsa spoke. "Yes, everything is good. Thank you."

The waiter turned to me again. "You know, when they execute Churchill, they'll show it live."

I sipped my coffee. "That should draw at least as big a crowd as the football."

CHAPTER TWO:

Churchill

The 23rd day of August, 1941, saw the end of Hitler's implacable English enemy. Churchill had escaped my grasp when we took London, but with the help of O'Duffy's Irish Army, he was caught in Belfast and brought to us. Hitler savored the show trial, where Judge Freisler, with the help of an interpreter, grilled the old bulldog mercilessly. People who were there told me how Churchill deployed his biting wit to shut Freisler up a few times. They said Hitler even cracked a grin from time to time.

However, there was never a doubt as to whether Churchill would come out of it alive. The verdict had been rendered the day before I flew home. He was "guilty of crimes against peace". The reason he wasn't executed sooner, I was told, was for me to be there to watch it happen. Keitel told me Hitler felt I should see it to feel my mission was complete. I guess he also remembered my brother Heinrich, buried at Norwich, and that it would give some measure of satisfaction. I admit that it did.

The newsreel and television cameras were covering the whole scene. As we "important" figures of Germany stood looking down on the stake to which Churchill would be tied, I looked around. The only one who showed me any warmth in his smile was Keitel, and that wasn't sincere. Goering grinned

at me, but that was it. Admirals Raeder and Doenitz did the same. Himmler just looked at me, as did the other big Nazis.

Keitel called "*Achtung*" as Hitler arrived. We faced him and saluted. Hitler, in turn, returned our salutes and shook hands with us. With Goering, Himmler and SS General Dietrich he managed a smile, but not the rest of us. After shaking my hand, he scooted over to the middle of the row. The SS firing squad arrived, stopped in front of us, and faced the stake. An SS lieutenant brought Churchill out in his prison stripes and, with two other men, tied him to the stake and put a hood over his head.

The two men left and the lieutenant stepped to the side and brought out a note. He read it in German and English. "Winston Spencer Churchill, Prime Minister of Great Britain, you have been tried and found guilty of crimes against peace. Your disregard for the rule of international law caused war, death and destruction to hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians. May God have mercy on your soul." He marched to the firing squad and order them to present arms. They opened the bolts of their rifles and he put a round in each one. He gave the orders. "Load. Ready. Take aim. Fire."

Churchill's body leaned forward and his knees buckled. A doctor stepped up and checked for a pulse. He turned to the lieutenant and nodded. The lieutenant had the squad shoulder their arms, do a left face, and they marched out.

I looked at Hitler. He stared as Churchill was taken from the stake. After a moment he noticed me looking at him. I stepped up and offered my hand. "Mission accomplished, my *Fuehrer*."

Hitler slowly shook my hand, then grinned. "Yes, von Halen, a job well done, thanks to you." He let go of my hand. "With your help, I can do the same thing to Stalin very soon."

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“I look forward to it, my *Fuehrer*.” Hitler accepted the handshakes of the others there and we all left, most to a party, but not me. I went back to the hotel.

Churchill's body was cremated and his ashes scattered in the Baltic.

CHAPTER THREE:

General Halder

The morning of 24 August, 1941 found me having breakfast with my family, as I waited for my new chief of staff to take me to my new office. "So, Mother," I asked Elsa as I pointed at the television, "did you watch the execution here?"

"Yes," Elsa replied, "the children and I watched."

"People were clapping." Sebald said.

"Of course they were."

"Did you clap, Papa?"

"Oh no, Sebald. We were at attention. You know you can't break the position of attention."

"Did you want to clap?"

"Well, I can't say I wouldn't have. After all, think of the people we knew who would be alive if it weren't for Churchill being so stubborn. Your Uncle Heinrich, Field Marshall von Rundstedt, General Busch, and in the last war, your Uncle Hans. It's a shame you didn't get to meet him."

"Will the Americans see the execution?" Irma asked.

"I think at least one of the newsreel cameramen was American, so yes."

"Do you think they'll get the idea and stay out of the war?"

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"I don't know, Irma. Roosevelt *should* get the idea, but I doubt it. Besides, our Japanese ally might hit them, and then who knows what might happen."

"If Japan is our ally," Sebald asked, "then why aren't they invading Russia?"

"Good question, son. I wish I knew." Elsa tapped me on the hand and pointed toward the doorway. An army general with glasses and a mustache was scanning the room. When he saw me, he walked over to our table. I stood up, we saluted and shook hands.

He spoke. "I'm *Generaloberst* Halder, *Herr Feldmarschall*. I'm your chief of staff."

"Good to meet you, Halder. This is my wife, Elsa."

Elsa turned in her seat and held up her right hand. "*Herr Generaloberst*."

Halder stepped around to her, clicked his heels, and kissed her hand. "*Gnaedige Frau*."

I pointed. "My daughter, Irma."

Irma stood up and curtsied and shook Halder's hand. "*Herr Generaloberst*."

"*Fraulein*."

I pointed again. "My son, Sebald."

Sebald sprang to his feet, gave the Nazi salute and shouted. "*Heil Hitler*."

Halder returned the salute and said, "*Heil Hitler*" as he shook my son's hand. Halder then turned to me. "We can go when you're ready, *Herr Feldmarschall*."

Elsa stood up. "Your bag is packed, dear." She turned to Sebald. "Go get your father's bag."

"Yes, Mama."

After he left, Elsa said. "We'll do a little sightseeing before taking the midday train for home." We embraced and kissed. "I'll miss you, *Liebchen*."

"I'll write you when I can." I turned to Irma and we hugged. "Take care of your mother and get your schoolwork done, too."

"Yes, Papa. I love you."

"I love you, too." Sebald showed up with my suitcase. "Follow us, Sebald."

"Yes, Papa."

When we got to the car, the driver opened the trunk and Sebald put my bag in. He then walked up to me. "*Auf Wiedersehen*, son." We embraced. "I love you, son."

"I love you, Papa." He stepped back and raised his arm. "*Heil Hitler*."

I raised my hand. "*Heil Hitler*." Sebald turned to go back in when I realized my secretary didn't know we were coming. "Sebald!"

"Ja?"

"*Fraulein* Inga doesn't know we're coming to collect her. Do you have that phone number she gave us?"

"Ja."

"Call it and tell her we're coming."

"*Jawohl, Herr Feldmarschall*." Sebald ran inside.

I turned to Halder. "That's the first time he's called me that." Halder smiled and got in the front seat. As the driver got in, I handed him a note. "My secretary is staying with her brother. That's the address."

He looked at the note for a moment before handing it back. "*Jawohl, Herr Feldmarschall*."

CHAPTER FOUR:

Zossen

After getting my secretary from her brother's house, we took the roughly hour-long drive to the headquarters of OKH, code named Maybach One, at Zossen. We showed our identity papers at the gate and drove south past two structures with a point on top and a large bunker. Halder pointed and said, "These are air raid shelters and the Post Office bunker. The telephone switchboards are there also."

"Multiple switchboards?" Inga asked.

"Yes, *Fraulein*. They service us as well as 'Maybach Two', Keitel's headquarters, or OKW."

"Where is that?" I asked.

Halder pointed ahead and to the right. "There's the turnoff over here beyond Hindenburg-Platz. But don't worry. We don't mingle, and both sides want it that way. If either of these complexes vanished from the earth, the other one wouldn't know or care."

We came to a stop at another gate, and after showing our passes, went through and turned left. There were twelve houses in an oval pattern. We stopped at the house with a "5" on the front door. As we stepped out of the car, Halder pointed, "Your new office is inside and down the steps, *Herr Feldmarschall*. From the air, it looks like any residential neighborhood, but it's really an office complex."

“Brilliant.” I nodded.

Halder pointed to the house on our right. “My office is in there. This office to our left is the office for the chief quartermaster. On the other side of the entrance road are the ‘enemy east office’ for our Russian Front operations, the ‘enemy west office’ to keep an eye on our occupation of Britain, and any action by the Free British, Free French and Dutch, as well as the Americans. At the far end is the *Luftwaffe* liaison, from which you can get hold of Field Marshal Milch at the Air Ministry, and he passes anything on to Goering.”

I nodded and turned around. “What about these?”

Halder pointed to the two houses opposite us. “These are for the operations department. This one to the right of them is for the chief of the transport corps.” He pointed across the entrance road and said, “We finish with the chief of the training command, chief of radio signals, and the chief of the signal corps.”

“Very good. When my secretary and I are settled, I’d like a meeting with everyone.”

“I’ll arrange it, *mein Herr*.”

“Also, Halder, it’s great to hear these things from another Bavarian. I find northern accents a little grating.”

Halder smiled. “Me too, Field Marshal von Halen, me too.”

CHAPTER FIVE:

The Summertime of War

My first month as commander of OKH was exciting and fast moving. The momentum I had watched with envy from London had not slackened. Our daily briefings were a point of pride for all of us, but especially Halder. Most of the *Barbarossa* plan in its present form was his doing. He'd been the one to add Army Group Center, so that Moscow was targeted by a dedicated group. After Moscow was taken, the army group would fan out towards the Urals and the Arctic Ocean. Hitler had to meddle, of course, and put most of the panzers with Army Group North, so Leningrad could be surrounded faster.

As for Army Group North, it was commanded by my old friend and "England hand" Field Marshal von Leeb. His drive through the Baltic States had been fast and efficient. He even had help from the locals. Estonian soldiers had been fighting a guerilla campaign for over a year against their Soviet occupiers, and were glad to help us kick the Russians out. It's too bad we repaid them the way we did.

Regardless of this, our forces facing Leningrad managed to penetrate to the Neva River by 28 August, and by 8 September had taken Schlüsselburg on the southern shore of Lake Ladoga. Our Finnish allies fought their way back to the pre-1939 border north of Leningrad, with a couple of

kilometers more ground taken for good measure, and on the east side of the lake as well, so that the siege could begin.

On the southern front, Field Marshal von Kuechler had charge of Army Group South and was plunging eastward with great abandon. The Romanians were besieging Odessa, and we were going for Kiev. As September wore on, General Guderian swung south through Gomel and Starodub to trap the enemy at the Ukrainian capitol. He completed the encirclement at Lokvitsa on 15 September, and four days later the Russians surrendered, and we took 600,000 prisoners.

The most important front, of course, was Army Group Center. It was here where we mimicked Napoleon and his narrow thrust on Moscow some 130 years earlier. From 30 September, Halder and his staff gave us our daily briefings on Operation Typhoon, the offensive we were sure would give us the Soviet capitol and the chance to do what Napoleon couldn't. Guderian and his 2nd Panzer Army thrust from the southwest, while 9th Army moved from west of Rzhev and Vyazma to bypass enemy lines of resistance and crush pockets of Russians. By 7 October, the Vyazma line was smashed, but then one of Russia's oldest allies, "General Mud", made its first appearance. Rain came down hard and fast, turning the ground our panzers rolled on into a thick paste that held up our advance and stuck us fast in some places. The Russians stubbornness in defense made me think of the British campaign, and how we had to be ruthless in attack then as well. Of course, this was also Hitler's race war. In London, I could take prisoners, or at least try to. In the Battle for Moscow, it was not encouraged.

Hitler would call each day, "encouraging" me to keep the men driving on. Keitel would do the same. It would sound like,

“Horst, the *Fuehrer* wonders why we aren’t in Moscow by now.”

“Then the *Fuehrer* hasn’t read Halder’s and my reports. We keep telling you people that our men and horses are up to their asses in mud, and our panzers up to their return rollers.” (That’s only a slight exaggeration, by the way.)

Keitel would them harumph, “Well, get moving anyway. Dig out and move onward. I want to tell the *Fuehrer* that we’re moving, von Halen.” That’s when I knew it was serious. Keitel wouldn’t call me by my last name until the heat was on from Hitler.

Well, come November, the ground did firm up, but that was from the cold. Snow and biting arctic winds were coming in on us, with our men in their summer uniforms and hobnailed boots. Russia’s other great ally, “General Winter”, had reported for duty. Army Group Center could report from 15 November that they were driving on again.

When our advance slowed to a crawl thanks to the cold, snow, and Russian resistance, Keitel had kept after me and I did my best to remind him how giving an order isn’t enough for it to happen. There was more than one occasion where I felt like telling Keitel, “If the *Fuehrer* thinks I’m so damned incompetent, he can send me on my way.” These were the times when I thought of Clausewitz. Among the things he wrote in his master work were that the great lieutenants didn’t always go on to make great generals. Sometimes a man would be out of his depth when he moved up. Sometimes I wondered if that applied to me. I would pray for strength and courage, and for His help for Germany.

We did manage to press on and by 27 November we had our northern pincer on the Volga Canal, some 30 kilometers north of Moscow. Our forward patrols said they were getting

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into the northern suburbs, and could see the Kremlin. Hitler and Keitel were overjoyed, as were the rest of us. We were so tantalizingly close.



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