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FREDERICK FORSYTH

AUTHOR OF *THE FIST OF GOD*

THE ODESSA FILE

Frederick Forsyth - The Odessa File

1972

FOREWORD

THE ODESSA of the title is neither the city in southern Russia nor the smaller city in Texas. It is a word composed of six initial letters, which in German stand for Organisation der ehemaligen SS-Angeh4drigen. In English this means "Organization of Former Members of the SS." The SS, as most readers will know, was the army within an army, the state within a state, devised by Adolf Hitter, commanded by Heinrich Himmler, and charged with special tasks under the Nazis who ruled Germany from 1933 to 1945. These tasks were supposedly concerned with the security of the Third Reich; in effect they included the carrying out of Hitler's ambition to rid Germany and Europe of all elements he considered to be "unworthy of life," to enslave in perpetuity the "subhuman races of the Slavic lands," and to exterminate every Jew, man, woman, and child, on the face of the Continent.

In carrying out these tasks the SS organized and executed the murder of some fourteen million human beings, comprising roughly six million Jews, five million Russians, two million Poles, half a million gypsies, and half a million mixed others, including, thcugh it is seldom mentioned, close to two hundred thousand nonJewish Germans and Austrians. These were either mentally or physically handicapped unfortunates, or so-called enemies of the Reich, such as Communists, Social Democrats, liberals, editors, reporters, and priests who spoke out too inconveniently, men of conscience and courage, and later Army officers suspected of lack of loyalty to Hitler.

Before it had been destroyed the SS had made the two initials of its name, and the twin-lightning symbol of its standard, synonymous with inhumanity in a way that no other organization before or since has been able to do.

Before the end of the war its most senior members, quite aware the war was lost and under no illusions as to how civilized men would regard their actions when the reckoning came, made secret provision to disappear to a new life, leaving the entire German people to carry and share the blame for

the vanished culprits. To this end vast sums of SS gold were smuggled out and deposited in numbered bank accounts, false identity papers were prepared, escape channels opened up. When the Allies finally conquered Germany, the bulk of the mass-murderers had gone.

The organization which they formed to effect their escape was the Odessa.

When the first talk of ensuring the escape of the killers to more hospitable climes had been achieved, the ambitions of these men developed. Many never left Germany at all, preferring to remain under cover with false names and papers while the Allies ruled; others came back, suitably protected by a new identity. The few very top men remained abroad to manipulate the organization from the safety of a comfortable exile.

The aim of the Odessa was and remains fivefold: to rehabilitate former SS men into the professions of the new Federal Republic created in 1949 by the Allies, to infiltrate at least the lower echelons of political party activity, to pay for the very best legal. defense for any SS killer hauled before a court and in every way possible to stultify the course of justice in West Germany when it operates against a former Karnerad, to see that former SS men established themselves in commerce and industry in time to take advantage of the economic miracle that has rebuilt the country since 1945, and finally to propagandize the German people to the viewpoint that the SS killers were in fact none other than ordinary patriotic soldiers doing their duty to the Fatherland, and in no way deserving of the persecution to which justice and conscience have ineffectually subjected them. In all these tasks, backed by its considerable funds, it has been measurably successful, and in none more so than in reducing official retribution through the West German courts to a mockery. Changing its name several times, the Odessa has sought to deny its own existence as an organization, with the result that many Germans are inclined to say the Odessa does not exist. The short answer is: it exists, and the Kameraden of the Death's Head insignia are still linked within it.

Despite its successes in almost all its objectives, the Odessa does occasionally take a defeat. The worst it ever suffered occurred in the early spring of 1964, when a package of documents arrived unannounced and anonymously at the Ministry of Justice in Bonn. To the very few officials

who ever saw the list of names on these sheets, the package became known as "The Odessa File.

PUBLISHERS' NOTE

As IN THE CASE OF Mr. Forsyth's first novel, The Day of the Jackal, many characters in The Odessa File are real people. Some will be immediately recognized by the reader; others may puzzle the reader as to whether they are true or fictional, and the publishers do not wish to elucidate further because it is in this ability to perplex the reader as to bow much is true and how much false that much of the grip of the story lies.

Nevertheless, the publishers feel the reader may be interested or assisted to know that the story of former SS Captain Eduard Roscbmann, the commandant of the concentration camp at Riga from 1941 to 1944, from his birth in Graz, Austria, in 1908 to his present exile in South America, is completely factual and drawn from SS and West German records.

New York

1972

THERE was a thin robin's-eggblue dawn coming up over Tel Aviv when the intelligence analyst finished typing his report. He stretched the cramped muscles of his shoulders, lit another filter-tipped Time, and read the concluding paragraphs. ne man on whose debriefing the report was based stood at the same hour in prayer fifty miles to the east at a place called Yad Vashem, but the analyst did not know this. He did not know precisely how the information in his report had been obtained, or how many men had died before it reached him. He did not need to know. All he needed was to be assured the informa- tion was accurate and that his forward-analysis was soundly and logically arrived at.

Corroborative details arriving in this office indicate the substantial accuracy of the named agent's claim with regard to the location of the factory. If the appropriate action is taken, it may safely be assumed the West German authorities will concern themselves with its dismantlement.

It is recommended that the substantial record of the facts be placed soon in the hands of these authorities. It is felt by this agency that this would be the best way of ensuring an attitude at the highest level in Bonn that will ensure the continuance of the Waldorf deal.

To all intents and purposes therefore the Right Honourable members of the Committee may be assured the project known as Vulkan is in the process of being dismantled. Consequent on this, our best authorities assure us the rockets can never fly in time. Finally, that being so, it may be concluded that if and when war with Egypt comes, that war will be fought and won by conventional weapons, whxh is to say by the Republic of Israel.

The analyst signed the foot of the document and dated it: February 23, 1964. Then he pressed a bell to summon a dispatch rider who would take it to the office of the Prime Minister.

Everyone seems to remember with great clarity what he was doing on November 22, 1963, at the precise moment he heard President Kennedy was dead. Ken- nedy was hit at twelve-thirty in the afternoon, Daflas time, and the announcement that he was dead came at about half past one in the same time zone. It was twothirty in New York, seven-thirty in the evening in London, and eight-thirty on a chilly, sleet-swept night in Hamburg.

Peter Miller was driving back into the town center after visiting his mother at her home in Osdorf, one of the outer suburbs of the city. He always visited her on Friday evenings, partly to see if she had everything she needed for the weekend and partly because he felt he had to visit her once a week. He would have telephoned her if she had a telephone, but as she had none, he drove out to see her. That was why she refused to have a telephone.

As usual, he had the radio on, and was listening to a music show being broadcast by Northwest German Radio. At half past eight he was in the Osdorf Way, ten minutes from his mother's flat, when the music stopped in the middle of a bar and the voice of the announcer came through, taut with tension.

"Achtung, Achtung. Here is an announcement. President Kennedy is dead. I repeat, President Kennedy is dead." Miller took his eyes off the road and stared at the dimly illuminated band of frequencies along the upper edge of the radio, as if his eyes would be able to deny what his ears had heard, assure him he was tuned in to the wrong radio station, the one that broadcast nonsense.

"Jesus," he breathed quietly, eased down on the brake pedal, and swung to the right-hand side of the road. He glanced up. Right down the long, broad, straight highway through Altona toward the center of Hamburg, other drivers had heard the same broadcast and were pulling in to the side of the road as if driving and listening to the radio had suddenly become mutually exclusive, which in a way they had.

Along his own side he could see the brake lights glowing on as the drivers ahead swung to the right to park at the curb and listen to the supplementary information pouring from their radios. On the left the headlights of the cars heading out of town wavered wildly as they too swung away toward the pavement. Two cars overtook him, the first hooting angrily, and he caught a glimpse of the driver tapping his forehead in Miller's direction in the usual rude sign, indicating lunacy, that one German driver makes to another who has annoyed him.

He'll learn soon enough, thought Miller.

The light music on the radio had stopped, replaced by the "Funeral March," which was evidently all the disk jockey had on hand. At intervals he read snippets of further information straight off the teleprinter, as they were brought in from the newsroom. The details began to fill in: the open-car ride into Dallas, the rifleman in the window of the School Book Depository. No mention of an arrest.

The driver of the car ahead of Miller climbed out and walked back towards him. He approached the lefthand window, then realized that the driver's seat was inexplicably on the right and came round the car. He wore a nylon-fur-collared jacket. Miller wound down his window.

"You heard it?" asked the man, bending down to the window.

"Yeah," said Miller.

"Absolutely fantastic," said the man. All over Hamburg, Europe, the world, people were walking up to complete strangers to discuss the event.

"You reckon it was the Communists?" asked the man.

"I don't know." "It could mean war, you know, if it was them," said the man.

"Maybe," said Miller. He wished the man would go away. As a reporter he could imagine the chaos sweeping across the newspaper offices of the country as every staff man was called back to help put out a crash edition for the morning breakfast tables. There would be obituaries to prepare, the thousands of instant tributes to correlate and typeset, the telephone lines jammed with yelling men seeking more and ever more details because a man with his head shattered lay dead in a city in Texas.

He wished in a way he were back on the staff of a daily newspaper, but since he had become a freelance three years earlier he bad specialized in news features inside Germany, mainly connected with crime, the police, the underworld. His mother hated the job, accusing him of mixing with "nasty people," and his arguments that be was becoming one of the most sought-after reporter-investigators in the country availed nothing in persuading her that a reporter's job was worthy of her only son.

As the reports from the radio came through, his mind was racing, trying to think of another "angle" that could be chased up inside Germany and might make a sidebar story to the main event. The reaction of the Bonn government would be covered out of Bonn by the staff men; the memories of Kennedy's visit to Berlin the previous June would be covered from there. There didn't seem to be a good pictorial feature he could ferret out to sell to any of the score of German picture magazines that were the best customers of his kind of journalism.

The man leaning on the window sensed that Miller's attention was elsewhere and assumed it was out of grief for the dead President. Quickly he dropped his talk of world war and adopted the same grave demeanor.

"fa, ja, ja," he murmured with sagacity, as if he had seen it coming all along. "Violent people, these Ameri- cans, mark my words, violent people. There's a streak of violence in them that we over here will never understand." "Sure," said Miller, his mind still miles away.

The man took the hint at last. "Well, I must be getting home," he said, straightening up. "Griiss Gott." He started to walk back to his own car.

Miller became aware he was going. Va, gute Nacht," he called out of the open window, then wound it up against the sleet whipping in off the Elbe River. The music on the radio continued in funereal vein, and the announcer said there would be no more light music that night, just news bulletins interspersed with suitable music.

Miller leaned back on the comfortable leather upholstery of his Jaguar and lit up a Roth-Hdndl, a filterless black-tobacco cigarette with a foul smell, another thing that his mother complained about in her disap- pointing son.

It is always tempting to wonder what would have happened if... or if not. Usually it is a futile exercise, for what might have been is the greatest of all the mysteries. But it is probably accurate to say that if Miller had not had his radio on that night he would not have pulled in to the side of the road for half an hour. He would not have seen the ambulance, or heard of Salomon Tauber or Eduard Roschmann, and forty months later the republic of Israel would probably have ceased to exist.

He finished his cigarette, still listening to the radio, wound down the window, and threw the stub away. At a touch of the button the 3.8-liter engine beneath the long sloping bonnet of the Jaguar XK 150 S thundered once and settled down to its habitual and comforting rumble, like an angry animal trying to get out of a cage. Miller flicked on the two headlights, checked behind, and swung out into the growing traffic stream along Osdorf Way.

He had got as far as the traffic lights on Stresemannstrasse, and they were standing at red, when he heard the clamor of the ambulance behind him. It came past him on the left, the wail of the siren rising and falling, slowed

slightly before heading into the road junction against the red light, then swung across Miller's nose and down to the right into Daimlerstrasse. Miller reacted on reflexes alone. He let in the clutch. and the Jaguar surged after the ambulance, twenty meters behind it.

As soon as he had done it he wished he had gone straight home. It was probably nothing, but one never knew. Ambulances meant trouble, and trouble could mean a story, particularly if one were first on the scene and the whole thing had been cleared up before the staff reporters arrived. It could be a major crash on the road, or a big wharf fire, a tenement building ablaze, with children trapped inside. It could be any- thing. Miller always carried a small Yashica with flash attachment in the glove compartment of his car because one never knew what was going to happen right in front of one's eyes.

He knew a man who had been waiting for a plane at Munich airport on February 6, 1958, and the plane carrying the Manchester United football team bad crashed a few hundred meters from where he stood. The man was not even a professional photographer, but be had umlung the camera he was taking on a skiing holiday and snapped the first exclusive pictures of the burning aircraft. The pictorial magazines had paid more than 50,000 marks for them.

The ambulance twisted into the maze of small and mean streets of Altona, leaving the Altona railway station on the left and heading down toward the river. Whoever was driving the flat-snouted, high-roofed Mercedes ambulance knew his Hamburg and knew how to drive. Even with his greater acceleration and hard suspension, Miller could feel the back wheels of the Jaguar skidding across the cobbles slick with rain.

Miller watched Menck's auto-parts warehouse rush by, and two streets later his original question was answered. Tbe ambulance drew up in a poor and sleazy street, ill lit and gloomy in the slanting sleet, bordered by crumbling tenements and rooming-houses. It stopped in front of one of these, where a police car already stood, its blue roof light twirling, the beam sending a ghostly glow across the faces of a knot of bystanders grouped round the door.

A burly police sergeant in a rain cape roared at the crowd to stand back and make a gap in front of the door for the ambulance. Into this the Mercedes slid. Its driver and attendant climbed down, ran round to the back, and eased out an empty stretcher. After a brief word with the sergeant, the pair hastened upstairs.

Miller pulled the Jaguar to the opposite curb twenty yards down the road and raised his eyebrows. No crash, no fire, no trapped children. Probably just a heart attack. He climbed out and strolled over to the crowd, which the sergeant was holding back in a semicircle around the door of the rooming-house.

"Mind if I go up?" asked Miller.

"Certainly do. It's nothing to do with you." "I'm press," said Miller, proffering his Hamburg city press card.

"And I'm police," said the sergeant. "Nobody goes up. Those stairs are narrow enough as it is, and none too safe. The ambulance men will be down right away." He was a big man, standing six feet three, and in his rain cape, with his arms spread wide to hold back the, crowd, he looked as immovable as a barn door.

"What's up, then?" asked Miller.

"Can't make statements. Check at the station later on.

A man in civilian clothes came down the stairs and emerged onto the pavement. The turning light on top of the Volkswagen patrol car swung across his face, and Miller recognized him. They had been at school together at Hamburg Central High. ne man was now a junior detective inspector in the Hamburg police, stationed at Altona Central.

"Hey, Karl." The young inspector turned at the call of his name and scanned the crowd behind the sergeant. In the next swirl of the police-car light he caught sight of Miller and his raised right hand. His face broke into a grin, part of pleasure, part of exasperation. He nodded to the sergeant.