

Spandau Prisoner Rudolf Hess

*John Q. Barrett**

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Rudolf Hess was one of Adolf Hitler's earliest friends and devoted supporters. Imprisoned with Hitler in the 1920s, Hess assisted his writing of *MEIN KAMPF*. Hess was at Hitler's side as the Nazi Party gained support and then political power. After Hitler became Chancellor of Germany in 1933, Hess became Deputy Führer. He assisted Hitler through the rest of the decade, as Nazi Germany built up its military strength and then started World War II, coercing some countries to capitulate and attacking others.

In May 1941, Hess became a British prisoner. He was captured in Scotland, where he had flown from Germany on an odd, apparently solo, mission. It seems that Hess thought he could show up and negotiate a United Kingdom-Germany peace agreement.

In 1945, following Nazi Germany's military defeat and unconditional surrender, the Allies created the International Military Tribunal (IMT), charged Hess as a war criminal, and transported him to Nuremberg for trial (where Justice Jackson of course served as chief U.S. prosecutor). Hess was tried there and, in Fall 1946, convicted of conspiracy and crimes against peace, and sentenced to life in prison.

Hess was transported to Spandau Prison in Berlin and served his sentence there. As other prisoners completed their terms and were released, Hess became the only person held in Spandau. He died there, by suicide, in 1987, age 93.

Over the years, a story developed that the real Hess had been somehow, at some point in 1941 or later, freed by switching him for a "double" who became the prisoner of Spandau.

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This story, which involved neo-Nazi Hess supporters and was meaningful to them, never seemed to have much to it.

In any case, it now seems to have been disproven. Austrian scientists, testing a preserved blood sample from the Spandau prisoner, have matched it to a DNA sample from a distant male relative of Hess.

Here are some links with further details—

- Report of the study results:
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1872497317302971?via%3Dihub>; and
- A BBC report on this news:
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-46964928>.