

This Month in the not so distant past

Looking back at historical moments that happened in November, **John Davis** highlights **The Lone Assassin**

It is November 8th, 1939. Germany has already been at war for two months but there is one anniversary the Nazi hierarchy just could not fail to celebrate.

It was on that date sixteen years previously that Adolf Hitler had led the famous Beer Hall putsch in which a fledgling Nazi Party had attempted to take over Munich and use it as a base to overthrow the national government, the Weimar Republic.

A confrontation follows a rally in the Burgerbraukeller when the insurgents are faced by armed policemen. Shots are exchanged resulting in the death of sixteen Nazi Party members, four officers and one by-stander

As a result of his participation, Hitler is later arrested, tried for treason and sentenced to five years in Landsberg Prison. In actuality he is only incarcerated for nine months during which time he produces his 'magnum opus' *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle).

So it is that every November 8th, Party adherents return to the Burgerbraukeller where leading officials, including usually Hitler himself, would pay homage to those heroic martyrs who had sacrificed their lives in 1923.

Several days before the 1939 event it looked as if Hitler and his colleagues, including Rudolf Hess, Heinrich Himmler, Reinhardt Heydrich and Joseph Goebbels, would renege on their promise to attend but plans are re-scheduled with the Fuhrer due to speak between 8 and 10 p.m. Thousands pack into the venue. There is much boisterousness and carousing until the formal party arrives and Hitler commences his speech.

A hurried message is passed to Hitler in mid flow. Fog will prevent a flight to Berlin so his only rapid return to the capital and important war business has to be by rail. Cutting his speech by an hour, Hitler leaves the hall at 9.07 p.m. and the three thousand strong gathering begin to slowly disperse. At 9.20 p.m. precisely, a tremendous explosion rips through the hall. The speakers' platform and the surrounding area shatters into pieces, a balcony collapses, part of the ceiling falls in and total chaos reigns.

Later it is revealed the blast has killed eight people and injured over sixty, some of them seriously. Hitler and his leading lieutenants have escaped the carnage by just thirteen minutes and perhaps the chance to change the course of history has just failed. Hitler at first speaks about his lucky escape though later he has become much more contemplative, "My leaving the hall earlier than usual is proof to me that Providence wants me to reach my goals," he says.

It is about 8.30 p.m. the same night, November 8th. Two observant guards at Konstanz, on the border between Germany and Switzerland, notice someone acting very suspiciously near the crossing. Dissatisfied with his explanation they take him to their border post to question him further.

They establish he is a German carpenter/clock maker named Georg Elser and, when he is asked to empty his pockets, they find wire cutters, notes and sketches about explosive devices, firing pins and a blank-coloured postcard of the Burgerbraukeller in Munich.

Wishing to demonstrate their efficiency, the guards call in the local Gestapo and, while Elser's interrogators continue to question him, the teleprinter suddenly bursts into life. It provides details of a major bomb explosion in Munich earlier that night, shortly after the departure of the Fuhrer and his party.

Elser is transported to Gestapo headquarters in Berlin. Hitler is made fully aware of the situation and places the head of the Gestapo, Heinrich Muller, in complete charge of the investigation. Elser, and later members of his family and work colleagues, are subjected to hours of questioning. Following weeks of torture, both physical and mental, Elser describes to his captors his 'modus operandi'

He reveals how he secreted himself inside the hall each night after it closed over a period of several weeks. During the early hours he would work on hollowing out a section of a large pillar next to the rostrum to make room for the bomb. Each time the outer panel of the pillar is replaced as normal, debris is packed into suitcases and bags before Elser sneaks

For SOUND SLEEP & STEADY NERVES
CADBURY'S
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THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 1939

ONE PENNY

LEFT-OVERS ARE
ENJOYABLE
WITH H-P SAUCE

ATTEMPT TO KILL HITLER

Explosion Wrecks Beer Cellar After Speech

AN attempt to assassinate Hitler was made in Munich last night.

A bomb exploded in the famous Buergerbrau beer cellar, where, only 27 minutes earlier, the Fuehrer had finished speaking to the Nazi "Old Guard."

Several people were killed (says B.U.P.) but Hitler escaped.

It is understood he had left the cellar some time before.

No details of the explosion were available in Berlin this morning. The Propaganda Ministry stated that it hoped "to know the complete story soon."

The Buergerbrau beer cellar was the place where Hitler gave the signal for his rising in 1923.

Yesterday was the anniversary of the rising in which 16 Nazis were killed. The remainder of the rebels, including Hitler, ran away.



"BE READY" WARNING TO BELGIANS

THE people of Belgium were told yesterday for the first time that their country may be invaded by the German forces who are massing on the frontier.

While the Foreign Office waited anxiously for the warring Powers' replies to the peace proposals made by Queen Wilhelmina and King Leopold, the Ministry of National Defence issued a communique.

It advised the population how to act in the event of aerial bombardment.

"Avoid important localities," the communique said. "Lie down if you are in the street. Trenches and cellars are safest."

All yesterday reservists who had been called up suddenly were passing through the capital in requisitioned buses and cars on their way to the front.

MEN CALLED UP
It was officially announced last night that another class has been called up.

Holland is also taking pre-

cautions. Reports from Amsterdam quoted by Reuter say that the Dutch military authorities are planning to flood many more acres of their country to guard against invasion from the east.

German planes are believed to have been making reconnaissance flights over both countries.

The Belgian Defence Ministry declared last night that violations of Belgian territory had been proved, and that it had been ascertained that the planes were neither British nor French.

The Ministry said that on Tuesday about a dozen planes flew over Belgium and apparently photographs were taken.

Anti-aircraft guns outside Amsterdam opened fire during Tuesday night on unidentified planes which were heard over the city.

Reports from Paris say that German troops are concentrated all along the Dutch and Belgian frontiers.

German engineers are reported to be constructing two new bridges over the Rhine near Emmerik, which is 70 miles west of Dusseldorf.

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Air Battle Over North Sea

BRITAIN'S "amateur airmen" have beaten Germany's best pilots again.

The Air Ministry announced last night that six British pilots of the Home Command—men who are not regular army fliers—were credited with the victory.

It is a series of articles which will be made available in the next few weeks. The first article will be made available in the next few weeks.



H.V.M.'s Biggest Job

H.V. MORTON is the greatest descriptive writer in modern journalism. At present he is covering for the "Daily Herald" as special assignment. He is writing a series of articles which will be made available in the next few weeks.

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and after part of the enemy's fuselage. After the fifth dive the enemy aircraft went down, partly out of control. As the first aircraft went down,

How the Daily Herald reported the story in November 1939. *Alamy.*

away as staff open up in the mornings. The bomb is constructed with a timing device at his lodgings using explosives and other equipment obtained from a quarry where he has been employed. Once finished, the device is placed into the hollow part of the pillar, the timer set and the panel re-sealed.

As to his motive, Elser tells them, "I reasoned the situation in Germany could only be modified by a removal of the current leadership.....I did not want to eliminate Nazism.....I had to do it because for his whole life Hitler has meant the downfall of Germany.....getting rid of Hitler became an obsession of mine."

What his Gestapo interrogators cannot accept however is how a simple craftsman like Elser could possibly construct so effective an explosive device and how he has managed to hatch and carry out the clandestine operation single-handedly. They even provide Elser with paper and pen so he can sketch out his designs and, after gathering all the materials together, watch intently as he intricately assembles a similar device to that which he has used.

With Elser still maintaining his version of the plot, he is transferred to the camp at Sachsenhausen in 1941 and then to Dachau early in 1945. There is no trial and Elser's prolonged stay in both camps still seems to have been based on the Gestapo's

belief that he would eventually reveal the names of co-conspirators.

In April 1945 with the Nazi regime crumbling, and wishing to tie up loose ends, destroy evidence and settle old scores, Elser, then aged 42, is executed at the same time as Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, former head of the Abwehr (Military Intelligence), and the theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Since the re-unification of Germany, memorials and plaques have been erected in memory of Georg Elser and throughout the country today over 60 streets are named after him. A special postage stamp was issued to commemorate his one hundredth birthday in 2003. Every two years the Georg Elser Prize is awarded to someone showing great courage against an oppressive regime.

Also see the film *13 Minutes* or *Elser*. It was released in 2015 and is directed by Oliver Hirschbiegel. (Not to be confused with a disaster movie from 2015 with the same name.)

Semi-retired and living in Lyme Regis, John Davis started working life as a newspaper journalist before moving on to teach in schools, colleges and as a private tutor. He is a history graduate with Bachelors and Masters degrees from Bristol University with a particular interest in the History of Education and Twentieth Century European History