



# DID IT REALLY HAPPEN?

A BEHIND-THE-SCENES LOOK AT  
WHERE FACT MEETS FICTION IN  
*CODE NAME EDELWEISS*



*Hitlerites infiltrating Hollywood.*

*Nazis taking over German-American groups in Los Angeles.*

*Anti-Semitic plots against actors and film executives. Threats of assassinations, bombs, and assaults on Jewish neighborhoods. Amateur spies reporting to a secret spymaster.*

Sounds too far-fetched to be true. That's what I thought.

When I stumbled upon the story of Leon Lewis and his spy network, I was skeptical. Why hadn't I heard about this before? How could something like this happen in America?

When I followed the research trail and found it was all too true, I knew I had to write a book based on this incredible and little-known event in American history. Of course, historical fiction needs more than facts. Along with real people, places, and events, I needed fictional characters, settings, and storylines.

So what is fact and what is fiction in *Code Name Edelweiss*?

Read on, and I'll let you in on the real history, characters, and events you'll find within the pages of my story. I hope you find the facts as fascinating as the fiction they inspired.



## WHO WAS LEON LEWIS AND WHY DID HE BECOME A SPYMASTER?

The Nazis called **LEON LEWIS** "the most dangerous Jew in Los Angeles." The police and the FBI called him a scaremonger. In reality, he was a strategist, a whistleblower, and an untiring defender of the oppressed.

So why doesn't every American know his name?

Because he was so good at what he did.

Born to German-Jewish immigrants in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 1888, Leon Lewis was an excellent student and received his law degree from the University of Chicago in 1913. Immediately, he began working on the cause he would dedicate his life toward: anti-discrimination.

During World War I, Lewis served in Army intelligence in Germany, France, and England. He stayed on in Europe in the Army's War Relief—managing the aftereffects of the war and the Spanish flu epidemic. It was during this posting that he began to see the growing anti-Semitism in Germany. When he returned to Chicago, he continued to keep watch on a young Austrian agitator named Adolf Hitler.

Lewis's concern increased in 1933, when Adolf Hitler was appointed chancellor of Germany—closely followed by a spike in Nazi influence in the German-American communities of Los Angeles. That was when Lewis began his work as a spymaster, recruiting Christian men and women to gather evidence against Nazi organizations infiltrating the City of Angels.

Leon Lewis's spy operation spanned more than a decade, much of that time spent filing motions, amassing evidence, attending hearings and other legal activities—deeds that were effective in prosecuting multiple Nazi agents, but not exactly the stuff of great fiction. I chose to write about the beginning of Leon Lewis's crusade, when he had few operatives and was desperately attempting to get authorities—both local and national—to recognize the threat of Adolf Hitler and his Nazi party.

Despite Leon Lewis's efforts, it wasn't until after Pearl Harbor that the government acted decisively against the Nazi agents in Los Angeles. J. Edgar Hoover's men in the



newly created FBI rounded up Nazi spies with surprising speed—using Leon Lewis’s records and years of compiled information to find and convict them. Leon Lewis, in his typical humble fashion, allowed the FBI to take all the credit. Hardly any mention of him made the newspapers or history books.

We know precious little of Leon Lewis’s personal life. He had a wife and two daughters and was said to be a quiet, unassuming, and humble man. Much like his life, Leon Lewis’s obituary, which appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* on May 22, 1954, was understated and all too short.



Photo credit: UCLA Charles E. Young Research Library, Department of Special Collections

Leon Lewis accomplished his goal: he stopped the Nazis’ plans to take over Los Angeles and Hollywood. I have no doubt he saved the lives of many innocent people and perhaps even kept World War II from the mainland of the USA. He deserves far more than a footnote in our history books. He deserves our deepest gratitude.



## WHO WERE THE REAL SPIES RECRUITED BY LEON LEWIS IN 1933?

Leon Lewis’s spies were regular men and women who stepped up to take a stand against evil, even at the risk of their own lives and the safety of their families.

Leon Lewis took great care in recruiting his spies:

- Almost all the spies were non-Jewish for two reasons. First, he was rightly afraid that no matter how good a Jewish spy was, a pro-Aryan German would suspect anyone who wasn’t Christian. Second, during the 1930s, anti-Semitism was deeply entrenched within America. Only non-Jewish eye-witnesses to the Nazi threat would convince prejudiced authorities that the threat was real, and not what they often termed “Jewish paranoia.”
- Many of his spies spoke German. Knowing the language was a great advantage to Lewis’s spies in convincing the Germans to trust them and discovering information about their operations.
- The men were often veterans of the First World War. A disgruntled veteran was the perfect cover for a spy. In 1933 Roosevelt had just cut veterans benefits and jobs were scarce, thus many of the men standing in breadlines were veterans—veterans who were angry, hungry, and trained for combat. Unfortunately, these men and their sons were also targeted by the Nazis for radicalization.

Lewis was right to take the utmost care. The Nazi infiltrators were dangerous and thought nothing of retaliating against Jews or “Jew-lovers” with violence. He had firm rules his spies agreed to follow:

1. Only communicate by code name
2. Don’t let any Nazis know a spy’s home address
3. Never write anything down in the presence of Nazis
4. Meet Lewis in person or talk on the phone, no written correspondence
5. Only Lewis knew the identities of all the spies



## WHAT WERE THE IDENTITIES OF THE SPIES WORKING FOR LEON LEWIS?

Over the years he worked as a spymaster, Lewis hired dozens of men and women to work for him. Here are a few of them.

**JOHN AND ALICE SCHMIDT** were a husband and wife spy team. John (Agent 11, Agent 74, Elf), was born in Germany, immigrated to America, and fought bravely in WWI. He and his wife, Alice (Agent 17), agreed to pose as Nazi sympathizers for Lewis. Alice was so convincing as a spy that she became the president of the Friends of New Germany's Ladies Auxiliary.

John and Alice spied for Leon Lewis for over ten years and helped him to compile enough information about the Friends of New Germany to bring some of them to trial in 1944. John was set to testify against the Nazis, including Hermann Schwinn, when he suddenly took ill. He died two days later. Alice suspected her husband had been poisoned by Nazi sympathizers. His death was investigated but foul play was never proven.

**NEAL NESS** (Agent N2) spent time in Germany and saw firsthand the havoc caused by Hitler's Brownshirts. That experience made him determined to stop the Nazis from gaining a hold on the United States. He started working for Lewis in 1935 and soon became Hermann Schwinn's right-hand man.

His spy activities came out in the open when he testified against the Nazis in 1939—testimony that made powerful enemies for Neal Ness. Five years later, after he fell and hit his head at a bar, the Los Angeles police jailed him on charges of intoxication. When his wife arrived to bail him out, they would not release the now-unconscious man, nor would they call a doctor to examine his head injury. Twelve hours later, he was finally allowed to go to a hospital, where he died without recovering consciousness. Leon Lewis suspected officers sympathetic to Nazis were at fault for his death, but nothing was ever proven.

**GRACE AND SYLVIA COMFORT** (code names G2 and S3) were a mother-daughter spy team. They were the real-life heroines on whom I based some of Liesl's story.

Grace Comfort, a widow, and her daughter Sylvia, a stenographer, attended social events and fascist women's groups while secretly reporting on their activities to Lewis. Sylvia was asked to attend secret meetings to take shorthand notes of their plans. She smuggled the copies to Leon Lewis under the Nazis' noses.

Despite Lewis's strict precautions, in 1938 the Nazis began to suspect Sylvia of being in league with "the most dangerous Jew in Los Angeles." She devised an elaborate scheme to set up a sham arrest at a post office. Her plan worked, and Sylvia continued to spy for Lewis until 1943, when leading Nazis once again began to suspect her. She stopped working for Lewis and moved to Washington, DC, where she had a long career working for Republican politicians into the 1960s. She died in 2003 at the age of 90.

The Schmidts, Neal Ness, and the Comforts were just a few of Leon Lewis's courageous spies to whom we owe our gratitude.



## HOW DID ADOLF HITLER GAIN POWER IN GERMANY?

It's a question I often asked myself as I researched *Code Name Edelweiss*. How did this radical man with his extremist ideas become the leader of Germany? The answer lies at the end of the “war to end all wars,” known now as the First World War.

The peace terms dictated to Germany after WWI were harsh, requiring the vanquished country to pay huge reparations to the victorious countries. What followed in Germany was economic collapse.

Inflation was astronomical as the value of the German mark plummeted:

1913 (before WWI):	\$1 = 4 German marks
1919 (after WWI):	\$1 = 47 German marks
1923:	\$1 = 353,000 German marks

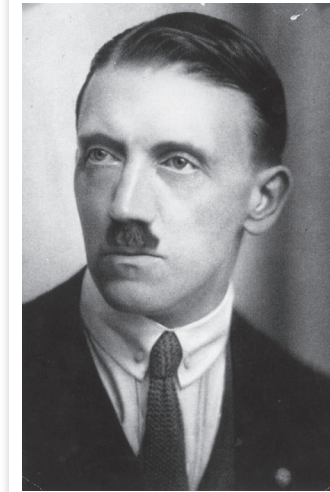
In simple terms, buying something like a pound of coffee now cost a struggling German half a million marks. By the end of 1923, 90 percent of an average family's budget was spent on food. Unsurprisingly, crime became commonplace as desperate people tried to survive and feed their families.

Economic instability led to rampant unemployment, fear, and distrust of the government. Most importantly, the German people were deeply divided along political lines of far left and far right. Civil unrest was the ultimate result, with Communist sympathizers and right-wing Brownshirts forming militias and engaging in frequent street fights and violence. For young men in the 1920s, political extremism, violence, and radicalization was a way of life.

Into this volatile mix entered Adolf Hitler, who already had his campaign against the Jewish people firmly in mind:

“If I am ever really in power, the destruction of the Jews will be my first and most

important job. As soon as I have power, I shall have gallows after gallows erected, for example, in Munich on the Marienplatz, as many of them as traffic allows. Then the Jews will be hanged one after another, and they will stay hanging until they stink. They will stay hanging as long as hygienically possible. As soon as they are untied, then the next group will follow and that will continue until the last Jew in Munich is exterminated. Exactly the same procedure will be followed in other cities until Germany is cleansed of the last Jew!” —Adolf Hitler to Joseph Hell, 1922, quoted in *Adolf Hitler* by John Toland (London: Book Club Associates, 1977, p. 116)



Adolph Hitler, circa 1923  
(UCLA Charles E.  
Young Research Library,  
Department of Special  
Collections)

In the early 1920s, Hitler and a core group of fellow radicals assembled a following of anti-Semitic, pro-German, master-race supporters and called themselves the National Socialist Party. They had little popular support, and the Nazi party received only 2.6 percent of the popular vote in the 1928 parliamentary elections.

The tide turned when the Great Depression hit not only America, but the struggling German economy. American banks, hard hit by the stock-market crash, called in their international loans to German banks. In turn, German banks called in their loans to German businesses, and many of them went bankrupt.

By 1931, 30 percent of German workers were again unemployed, with millions more barely making ends meet. The German government bickered along party lines—the left advocating spending on welfare, the right pushing for cutbacks—while violence ravaged the streets between gangs of Nazi Brownshirts and Communists. Communist party rhetoric promised the destruction of capitalism, which pushed the large middle-class—who remembered very well what had happened just years earlier

in Russia—toward the radical political right of fascism.

In 1933, the failing government, led by President Hindenburg, reached out to the now-popular National Socialist party, hoping to unite the people. Hindenburg appointed the leader of the Nazis, Adolf Hitler, as chancellor of Germany in January 1933.

What quickly followed, unfortunately, was the rise of Nazi Germany:

**JANUARY:** Hitler appointed Chancellor. Nazi party controls one third of the seats in the Reichstag.

**FEBRUARY:** Reichstag building destroyed by fire. The Nazis blame the Communists, although it was most likely planned and executed by Hitler and his followers.

**MARCH:** The Enabling Act is passed, giving Hitler four years of almost total power. He proclaims the Nazi party the only party permitted in Germany.

**APRIL AND MAY:** Communist party, Socialist party, Trade Unions banned.

**OCTOBER:** Hitler withdraws Germany from the League of Nations. German army increased to triple its former size.

**JUNE 30, 1934:** Hitler crushes all opposition in the Night of Long Knives, a purge of his own party when he ordered his elite SS troops to murder hundreds of Nazi leaders, political figures, professors, and critics. Over 150 people are shot and hundreds more arrested.

Even after these events, many world leaders failed to take the threat of Adolf Hitler seriously . . . to the everlasting regret and sorrow of millions during the years of war and genocide that followed.



## WERE THERE REALLY NAZIS IN LOS ANGELES IN 1933?

Yes, and very dangerous ones.

Historical evidence shows that the Friends of New Germany, along with the KKK and other fascist organizations, plotted violence, assassinations, and attacks on the Jewish members of the film industry and community beginning in 1933 and continuing even after the US entry into WWII.

The real leaders of the **FRIENDS OF NEW GERMANY** were radical, brutal, and highly dangerous.



From left to right: Friends of New Germany Dr. Konrad Burchardi, Hermann Schwinn, Ludwig Leithold, and Hans Winterhalder appear in court, Los Angeles, 1933–1934 (UCLA Charles E. Young Research Library, Department of Special Collections)

**HERMANN SCHWINN** was the leader of the Friends of New Germany (FNG). He was a member of the Nazi party. Hermann was married to **THEKLA SCHWINN**, and even his dog, **LUMP**, was noted in the historical record.

**HANS WINTERHALDER** was the propaganda chief and a primary recruiter for the FNG. It was his efforts that turned the basement of the Alt Heidelberg building into a barracks for unemployed and angry German-American veterans, and from them recruited a force of military-trained Silver Shirts.

In 1933, **PAUL THEMLITZ** was the owner of the Aryan Bookstore in the Alt Heidelberg building and a key member of the FNG. The bookstore was an ideal way to distribute Nazi propaganda, anti-Communist literature, and German newspapers that were already under the control of the Nazi Party. And of course, they carried copies of Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*.

The Friends of New Germany weren't the only Nazi organization in 1933 Los Angeles. Other organizations, sometimes referred to as "the fifth column," were supporters of the Nazis and collaborated with the FNG.

- The Ku Klux Klan
- The Silver Shirts
- National Gentile League
- The American Patriots
- American Defense Society
- The Christian Women's Brigade

In addition to organizations such as these, there were prominent Americans who espoused the Nazi agenda. Many of them had the wealth and influence to spread Hitler's propaganda.

- **HENRY FORD**'s weekly newspaper launched a campaign against what he called "the international Jew," in which he accused Jewish leaders of everything from Communism to the moral decline of America. He also funded the distribution of over half a million copies of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, billed as "a Jewish plan for world domination."
- **LAURA INGALLS** (not the writer Laura Ingalls Wilder, although a distant relation) was a popular aviator who toured the country promoting the Nazi agenda. She was arrested in 1941 and convicted of being a paid Nazi agent. She served 20 months in prison for the crime.
- **CHARLES LINDBERGH**, the wildly popular aviator, was an unapologetic anti-Semite. "A few Jews add strength and character to a country, but too many create chaos," Lindbergh wrote in his diary. "Their greatest danger to this country lies in their large ownership and influence in our motion pictures, our press, our radio and our government."



## WHAT HAPPENED TO THE FRIENDS OF NEW GERMANY LEADERS?

Thanks to Leon Lewis, **HERMANN SCHWINN** was arrested in 1942 and stood trial for sedition with 26 other Nazis. He was sentenced to five years in prison. In 1944, he was charged with more crimes in what became known as the Great Sedition Trial. Many of Lewis's undercover operatives testified of Schwinn's plan to impose Naziism on the American public and kill anyone who got in his way. They did not mention Leon Lewis by name in any of the court proceedings. The trial was declared a mistrial when the presiding judge had a heart attack, and in 1946 the case was dismissed.

In 1947, Schwinn and his Nazis collaborators were sent to Ellis Island to await deportation. Instead, they fled to Argentina, where many Nazis had found refuge after the war. In 1962, Hermann Schwinn applied for and was granted a visa and reunited with his wife, Thekla, in San Antonio, Florida. He lived out the rest of his life there—in a predominantly Jewish community of Holocaust survivors—until his death in 1973.

Unfortunately, many of the other Nazi operatives of the FRG were allowed to remain in the United States despite the charges against them.





## DID THE NAZIS REALLY PLOT TO TAKE OVER HOLLYWOOD?

Yes, they did. Here are two of the real plots we know about, thanks to Leon Lewis's meticulous record-keeping.

### THE BRITISH MENACE

British fascist and failed actor Leopold McLaglan made his living teaching “how to kill through jiu-jitsu” to rich Californians. With the help of Hermann Schwinn, McLaglan hatched a plan to kill Jewish studio executives, members of the Hollywood Anti-Nazi League, and the Christians who aided them.

Chuck Slocombe, one of Lewis's spies, swiped the assassination list—with Leon Lewis's name as the number-one target. The other 23 names were some of the most famous people in Los Angeles, including Charlie Chaplin, Samuel Goldwyn, Jack Benny, and James Cagney.

McLaglan's plan was a coordinated attack on the targets with bombs, drive-by shootings, and terrorist strikes all on the same night.

Slocombe foiled the plan when he convinced McLaglan's accomplices that the British terrorist was planning to pin the crime on them. The accomplices double-crossed McLaglan and signed sworn statements that accused McLaglan of attempted murder. McLaglan was arrested, but after a trial was convicted only of extortion and sent back to England.

### THE GEFKEN AFFAIR

In another plan, a Nazi named Dietrich Gefken planned a sinister plot to take control of the entire West Coast. He obtained detailed plans of the San Diego Armory and its weapons from a Nazi sympathizer in the National Guard. Gefken's plan was to use the Silver Shirts, German-American veterans, and German storm troopers to launch coordinated uprisings in San Francisco and San Diego.

His troops, Gefken told Lewis's spies, would sail German ships into California ports, then take any Army officers who opposed them prisoner. Officers who pledged their loyalty to Hitler would become part of the revolution, those who refused would be shot.

Leon Lewis alerted the Los Angeles police and the San Diego National Guard to what was planned and promised to get evidence. He arranged to have the police secretly listen to Gefken in a bugged hotel room. Unfortunately, all did not go as planned. The police botched the sting and Gefken went free. The Navy, however, arrested two Naval officers caught selling government arms and ammunition to the Silver Shirts, thus foiling the plot.

Lewis never took credit for the arrests to ensure his operation would remain secret.





## WHO WAS THE “MOST CHARMING NAZI IN LOS ANGELES”?

Vice-consul Georg Gyssling was a mystery to many. Was he a Nazi? Or was he secretly anti-Hitler? Even Leon Lewis himself didn't know for sure.

### GEORG GYSSLING, THE NAZI DIPLOMAT

Georg Gyssling was raised in what is now Poland but in the late 1800s was considered part of Germany. He was an excellent student who postponed his studies to serve the German army in WWI and was wounded and discharged. What followed was an illustrious career in the German diplomatic corps, including assignments in New York and a stint on Germany's Olympic bobsled team in the 1932 Winter Olympics in Lake Placid, New York. He had no experience and agreed to jump in as a substitute for an injured member of the team. His team came last in the event.

In 1933 Gyssling was made vice-consul in Los Angeles. His diplomatic task: to stop the production and export of anti-German and pro-Jewish films.

Adolf Hitler's policies regarding American films brooked no argument. The Reich Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, with Joseph Goebbels presiding, stated, “We are convinced that the film is one of the most modern and far-reaching means for influencing the masses.” Goebbels demanded Gyssling exert control over any Hollywood productions that said anything about Germany, Adolf Hitler, or the Jewish people.

Gyssling's job was to enforce the following guidelines for American films:

1. Films may not feature Jewish characters
2. Jewish actors could not feature in any films exported to Germany
3. Jewish life could not be portrayed in a positive way
4. No defamation of Germany or its Nazi leaders
5. German characters in films could not be portrayed in a negative manner

Studios were forced to comply with German guidelines because they were in dire financial straits, and to lose a large market like Germany would be one step closer to bankruptcy. There was also the idea among many of the Jewish studio moguls that to openly denounce Hitler and his anti-Semitism would lead to a negative reaction against Jews in the United States—a confirmation of the stereotypical “exaggeration of injury” that many people believed of the Jewish people.

In addition to his influence on the studios, Gyssling made thinly veiled threats to Jewish studio executives, screenwriters, and actors. They were warned their German property could be seized or reprisals visited upon their German family members if they refused to comply with Nazi film guidelines.

Gyssling was a registered member of the Nazi party and, in public discourse, followed the party line. In 1933, he denied that Jews were being persecuted in his home country. “The few Jews who have met with violence have not been singled out because of their race, but because they were Communist leaders and agitators,” he claimed. He also denied that Nazi groups were forming in the city or that the new chancellor of Germany had plans to spread Nazism to the United States. “National Socialism is purely German and no article of export,” he asserted in a letter to the *Los Angeles Record*.

### THE OTHER SIDE OF GEORG GYSSLING

While his diplomatic life was ordered and efficient, Georg's home life was more complicated.

He was known as a charming host and a lavish entertainer. His parties were filled with the elite of Hollywood and Los Angeles. Notably, Jewish studio executives and actors were frequent guests at his home despite his connection to the Nazi party.

His wife, Ingrid, was no less mysterious. She claimed to have a medical degree from Heidelberg University and stated she was a devoted housewife and mother to the couple's two children—a daughter, Angela, and a son with a disability. But according to Angela, Ingrid had no medical degree and was an absent mother to both her and her disabled brother, who lived in Hamburg with his grandparents. According to some sources, when Ingrid was ostensibly visiting her son in Germany, she was actually living a life of parties and leisure on one of her father's ships in the Caribbean. In 1935, she left Los Angeles and never returned. Eventually the German courts granted Gyssling a divorce, which was frowned upon by the Nazi regime.

Gyssling, however, was rarely without female company, most notably his housekeeper, Christine Boone, and socialite Jo Alderman. Alderman assisted Gyssling in his social events, organizing his parties, and keeping him at the top of the social hierarchy of Los Angeles. Christine Boone's friendship was rumored to be of a more personal

nature.

Georg Gyssling's daughter, Angela, had a close relationship with her father and described him as a devout German nationalist, but no Nazi. According to Angela, Gyssling had friendships with—and even assisted—Jewish immigrants throughout his career in Los Angeles. Her father, she said, had a code by which Jewish people could reach him by telephone. He used the name Ginsberg. If a phone call came in requesting Dr. Ginsberg, he would know it was a Jewish immigrant calling for his help.

Gyssling had another secret, his friendship with Julius Klein, a German-born Jew and National Guard member. According to Angela, Klein was often a guest in the Gyssling home, although the friendship was kept a secret. Angela contended that her father passed valuable information to Klein that might “hasten the demise of the Hitler regime.” Klein also had a business relationship with Leon Lewis, but it is not known whether Lewis knew about Klein's friendship with Gyssling.

Talk about a complicated web of secrets!

To make things even more complicated, Hermann Schwinn wanted Gyssling's job for himself. He attempted to get the vice-consul fired by complaining to Nazi party officials in Berlin that Gyssling was too soft in the campaign against the Jews of Los Angeles.

In the summer of 1941, Gyssling was forced to return to Germany, where he was accused of providing inadequate reports to his Nazi superiors. The Gestapo had him brought to Berlin and interrogated. No formal charges were brought against him, and he was sent on a new diplomatic mission to Italy. He was eventually involved in Operation Sunrise, a negotiation of the surrender of German forces in Italy to the allies.

Gyssling was brought to trial in Nuremberg with other Nazi officials. He was eventually cleared by the American Denazification Board on the strength of a character reference from Julius Klein, who wrote of Gyssling's time as the vice-consul in Los Angeles: He did “everything to help us in those crucial days.”

George Gyssling reunited with Christine Boone and lived in Spain until his death in 1965.

Perhaps we'll never know where vice-consul Georg Gyssling's true loyalties lay. With all the mystery surrounding him, he merits a book of his own, don't you agree?



## WHAT WAS THE ANTI-NAZI FILM THAT WAS NEVER MADE?

If you need more proof that truth is stranger than fiction, look no further than the real-life script of *The Mad Dog of Europe* by Herman Mankiewicz.

“Mank,” as he was known in Hollywood, was a brilliant—if difficult—Jewish screenplay writer for MGM, who, like Lewis, saw the dangers of Adolf Hitler and attempted to sound a warning.

Like Lewis's, his warning went unheeded.

In 1933 he wrote *The Mad Dog of Europe*, a scathing attempt to alert the American public to what was happening in Europe. Georg Gyssling took one look at the screenplay and told studio executives that if this film was produced, every Hollywood studio would be immediately banned from the German market.

Here's a little of what had Gyssling in a temper:

- *The Mad Dog of Europe* is set in “Transylvania,” where a housepainter named “Adolf Mitler” rises to power after a world economic crash.
- Mitler instigates the burning of books by Albert Einstein and Upton Sinclair, and the Bible.
- Jews are harassed on the streets and Jewish teachers driven from schools.
- All Aryans married to Jews are ordered to divorce or go to prison camps.
- Famous Americans support Adolf Mitler's rise to power.

Mank wrote this screenplay the year Adolf Hitler was declared the leader of Germany, five years before he took over Austria, orchestrated Kristallnacht, or invaded Poland. To call *The Mad Dog of Europe* prophetic is an understatement.

To add insult to injury, the never-subtle Mank included an on-screen disclaimer at the beginning of the film that read:

THE INCIDENTS AND CHARACTERS IN THIS PICTURE ARE OF COURSE FICTITIOUS. IT IS OBVIOUSLY ABSURD TO ASK ANYONE TO BELIEVE THEY COULD HAPPEN IN THIS ENLIGHTENED DAY AND AGE.

When the studios backed out of the project, Mank attempted to find alternate funding but was thwarted. Some film executives in Hollywood claimed *Mad Dog* would make Jews the object of backlash; other executives were more worried about offending their foreign markets. Another objection, likely valid, was that putting out such a blatantly anti-German film would result in repercussions to Jewish relatives in Germany.

Leon Lewis himself agreed the film would be detrimental to his cause. Like many Jews of the time, he felt it was better for anti-Hitler warnings to be spread by Christians in order to be believed.

In the end, *The Mad Dog of Europe* was never made. Herman Mankiewicz, who had struggled with alcoholism for years, died from its effects in 1953 at the age of 55—a prophet whose warning, unfortunately, was all too accurate.

#### Charges Nazis Here Using Threats to Halt Production Of "Mad Dog of Europe"

(Jewish Daily Bulletin)

LOS ANGELES, Cal., Oct., 21—Charging that an attempt is being made to stop the production of the cinema, "The Mad Dog of Europe" by intimidating the Hays organization and other producers, Al Rose, a Hollywood arts representative and spokesman for the March of Time Productions, in an interview with a representative of the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, said he bitterly resents the interference of Reich officials.

"I have it on good authority," said Mr. Rose, "that the Hays organization was approached by representatives of Dr. Luther and of Dr. Gyssling of Los Angeles to use its influence with the producers in Hollywood to make me stop the production of 'The Mad Dog of Europe'. But I shall go ahead nevertheless."

"The German officials have intimated that the property of the large Hollywood producers in Germany would be confiscated and further American pictures would not be imported into Germany," continued Mr. Rose, "unless they use their influence and pressure upon me to make me withdraw this film. Most of these large producers are Jewish firms, and they call themselves Jews."

"This picture, with the shots of actual scenes taken in Germany on the day of the Jewish boycott, and with authenticated and authoritative representation of the oppression, and cruelty of the Nazis against the Jews and other minority races, and

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#### Charges Nazis Here Using Threats to Halt Production Of "Mad Dog of Europe"

(Continued from Page 3)

unpopular political parties and religions, will visualize to the world what is actually being done.

"They say that if my picture is produced, the Jews in Germany will be harmed. Any normally informed American knows that the Jews in Germany have suffered exile, imprisonment, brutality, denial of the privilege of earning their living, and are not infrequently executed. Could a race thus outraged be inflicted with newer or greater outrages? The press is full of the stories of Nazi brutality. Have these organs created any greater outrage upon the German Jews by printing these stories? Then why should they object when we are going to visualize the actual scenes before the American public?"

"Without having seen the manuscript, without, indeed, having asked to see it, friends and adherents of Hitler have accused me of vicious intentions. However, it strikes me that the loyal Hitlerites insult their leader by their objections to the picture. By their objections they acknowledge that a filmed record of the German Chancellor's career is a record of shame. That is there insistence, not mine."

"Biographies are lives, not written, and if the Chancellor's followers in America do not like our story, let them address their protests to Adolf Hitler. He is the author."



## A STORY DOESN'T HAVE TO BE TRUE TO SHOW US THE TRUTH.

Now that you know the facts behind the fiction of *Code Name Edelweiss*, do you find it as fascinating as I do? I hope so. I've only mentioned some of the people, plots, and almost unbelievable events that really happened when Leon Lewis and his spy network took on the Nazis of Los Angeles.

But . . .

Historical fiction is more than recounting facts and events. It requires compelling characters, authentic settings, and a page-turning storyline—all things I hope you find in the pages of *Code Name Edelweiss*. A little of what you will see in the fictional account:

**LEON LEWIS** as he attempted to recruit the first members of his spy network.

**LIESL WEISS**, who represents the real women of Leon Lewis's spy network—devoted to her family and suffering both the hardships of the Depression and the difficulty of being a single mom.

**AGENT THIRTEEN**, a combination of many of the dedicated men who helped Leon Lewis uncover the Nazis in Los Angeles—but with a generous dash of good looks, heroism, and mystery!

**HERMANN SCHWINN** and his Nazi accomplices, chilling recreations of the real Nazis that worked and plotted in Los Angeles. You'll also find a fictionalized version of **LEOPOLD MCLAGLAN**, jujitsu expert and leader of the Silver Shirts, among the villains in the novel.

**GEORG GYSSLING** is a complex character, with ties to both the Nazis and Leon Lewis, and an integral part of the story.

As with all my fiction, my intention is to write the truth of the characters—how they are forced to grow and change through the dangers and difficulties they face. My hope is that when you turn the last page of *Code Name Edelweiss*, you've gained meaningful insights into courage, conviction, faith, and love that both encompass

and transcend the historical record.

Thank you for choosing to read *Code Name Edelweiss*. I appreciate each and every one of my readers!

If you enjoy knowing the facts behind the fiction, join me for the video series “Where Fact Meets Fiction.” Each month, I interview one of my favorite historical fiction authors and delve deeply in to the research and fascinating facts behind their fiction.



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