

The
Swiss Courier

A NOVEL

TRICIA GOYER AND MIKE YORKEY



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Scripture is taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

This is a work of historical fiction; the appearances of certain historical figures is therefore inevitable. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the authors' imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

To the Reader

In the early afternoon of July 20, 1944, Colonel Claus Graf von Stauffenberg confidently lugged a sturdy briefcase into *Wolfsschanze*—Wolf’s Lair—the East Prussian redoubt of Adolf Hitler. Inside the black briefcase, a small but powerful bomb ticked away, counting down the minutes to *der Führer*’s demise.

Several generals involved in the assassination plot arranged to have Stauffenberg invited to a routine staff meeting with Hitler and two dozen officers. The one o’clock conference was held in the map room of *Wolfsschanze*’s cement-lined underground bunker.

Stauffenberg quietly entered the conference a bit tardy and managed to get close to Hitler by claiming he was hard of hearing. While poring over detailed topological maps of the Eastern Front’s war theater, the colonel unobtrusively set the briefcase underneath the heavy oak table near Hitler’s legs. After waiting for an appropriate amount of time, Stauffenberg excused himself and quietly exited the claustrophobic bunker, saying he had to place an urgent call to Berlin. When a Wehrmacht officer noticed the bulky briefcase was in his way, he inconspicuously moved it away from Hitler, placing it

behind the other substantial oak support. That simple event turned the tide of history.

Moments later, a terrific explosion catapulted one officer to the ceiling, ripped off the legs of others, and killed four soldiers instantly. Although the main force of the blast was directed away from Hitler, the German leader nonetheless suffered burst eardrums, burned hair, and a wounded arm. He was in shock but still alive—and unhinged for revenge.

Stauffenberg, believing Hitler was dead, leaped into a staff car with his aide Werner von Haefen. They talked their way out of the Wolfsschanze compound and made a dash for a nearby airfield, where they flew back to Berlin in a Heinkel He 111. When news got out that Hitler had survived, Stauffenberg and three other conspirators were quickly tracked down, captured, and executed at midnight by a makeshift firing squad.

An enraged Hitler did not stop there to satisfy his bloodlust. For the next month and a half, he instigated a bloody purge, resulting in the execution of dozens of plotters and hundreds of others remotely involved in the assassination coup. The Gestapo, no doubt acting under Hitler's orders, treated the failed attempt on the Führer's life as a pretext for arresting 5,000 opponents of the Third Reich, many of whom were imprisoned and tortured.

What many people do not know is that Hitler's manhunt would dramatically alter the development of a secret weapon that could turn the tide of the war for Nazi Germany—the atomic bomb.

This is that story . . .

List of Major Characters

(in order of appearance)

Jean-Pierre: a Swiss male in his twenties who participates in underground activities in Germany and Switzerland.

Gabi Mueller: the twenty-four-year-old daughter of an American father and Swiss mother working in the translation pool at the Basel office of the OSS (Office of Strategic Services), the American intelligence-gathering operation in Switzerland during World War II and the forerunner of the CIA (Central Intelligence Organization).

Ernst Mueller: Born in New Glarus, Wisconsin, to Swiss parents, Ernst met his wife-to-be, Thea, at a missionary conference. They married and have three children: Gabi and the twins, Andreas and Willy. They live in Riehen, Switzerland, just across the border from Germany. A furniture maker by trade, he is also a part-time pastor of a “free” church in Switzerland.

Thea Mueller: A native of Switzerland, she is Gabi’s mother and a full-time homemaker.

Dieter Baumann: a Swiss in his late twenties who's working for the Americans at the OSS office in Basel, where he is in charge of operations.

Allen Dulles: the American spymaster who opened the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) bureau in neutral Switzerland in 1942 to collect information on Nazi Germany and run a spy network. He runs his nascent espionage network from Bern, the Swiss capital.

Sturmbannführer Bruno Kessler: the fast-rising head of the Gestapo Regional Headquarters in Heidelberg, Germany, where he established a reputation as a fierce hunter of Jews.

Corporal Benjamin Becker: the young aide-de-camp for Bruno Kessler.

Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler: the feared chief of the Gestapo, the secret police of the Nazi regime.

Werner Heisenberg: A winner of the 1932 Nobel Prize for his discoveries in quantum physics, Dr. Heisenberg was in charge of the research program behind the construction of an atomic bomb at the University of Heidelberg.

Joseph Engel: a twenty-seven-year-old physicist working under Professor Heisenberg at the University of Heidelberg.

Eric Hofstadler: a Swiss dairy farmer in his mid-twenties who's in love with Gabi Mueller.

Captain Bill Palmer: a U.S. Army Air Corps pilot who managed to land his damaged B-24 Liberator in Switzerland instead of being shot down over Germany. He is being interned with other American and British pilots in Davos, away from the population centers and high up in the Alps.

Andreas and Willy Mueller: the younger twin brothers of Gabi and guards at the internment camp for American and British pilots in Davos because of their fluency in English.

Waldshut, Germany
Saturday, July 29, 1944
4 p.m.

He hoped his accent wouldn't give him away.

The young Swiss kept his head down as he sauntered beneath the frescoed archways that ringed the town square of Waldshut, an attractive border town in the foothills of the southern Schwarzwald. He hopped over a foot-wide, water-filled trench that ran through the middle of the cobblestone square and furtively glanced behind to see if anyone had detected his presence.

Even though Switzerland lay just a kilometer or two away across the Rhine River, the youthful operative realized he no longer breathed free air. Though he felt horribly exposed—as if he were marching down Berlin's Kurfürstendamm screaming anti-Nazi slogans—he willed himself to remain confident. His part was a small but vital piece of the larger war effort. Yes, he risked his life, but he was not alone in his passion.

A day's drive away, American tanks drove for the heart of Paris—and quickened French hearts for *libération*. Far closer, Nazi reprisals thinned the ranks of his fellow resisters. The young man shuddered at the thought of being captured, lined up against a wall, and hearing the *click-click* of a safety being unlatched from a Nazi machine gun. Still, his legs propelled him on.

Earlier that morning, he'd introduced himself as Jean-Pierre to members of an underground cell. The French Resis-

tance had recently stepped up their acts of sabotage after the Allies broke out of the Normandy beachhead two weeks earlier, and they'd all taken *nom de guerres* in their honor.

Inside the pocket of his leather jacket, Jean-Pierre's right hand formed a claw around a Mauser C96 semiautomatic pistol. His grip tightened, as if squeezing the gun's metallic profile would reduce the tension building in his chest. The last few minutes before an operation always came to this.

His senses peaked as he took in the sights and sounds around him. At one end of the town square, a pair of disheveled older women complained to a local farmer about the fingerling size of the potato crop. A horse-drawn carriage, transporting four galvanized tin milk containers, rumbled by while a young newsboy screamed out, "*Nachrichten!*"

The boy's right hand waved day-old copies of the *Badische Zeitung* from Freiburg, eighty kilometers to the northwest. Jean-Pierre didn't need to read the newspaper to know that more men and women were losing their lives by the minute due to the reprisals of a madman.

Though the planned mission had been analyzed from every angle, there were always uncertain factors that would affect not only the outcome of the mission but who among them would live. Or die.

Their task was to rescue a half-dozen men arrested by local authorities following the assassination attempt on Reichskanzler Adolf Hitler. If things went as Jean-Pierre hoped, the men would soon be free from the Nazis' clutches. If not, the captives' fate included an overnight trip to Berlin, via a cattle car, where they would be transported to Gestapo headquarters on Prinz-Albrecht-Strasse 8. The men would be questioned—tortured if they weren't immediately forthcoming—until names, dates, and places gushed as freely as the blood spilling upon the cold, unyielding concrete floor.

Not that revealing any secrets would save their lives. When the last bit of information had been wrung from their minds, they'd be marched against a blood-spattered wall or to the

gallows equipped with well-stretched hemp rope. *May God have mercy on their souls.*

Jean-Pierre willed himself to stop thinking pessimistically. He glanced at his watch—a pricey Hanhart favored by Luftwaffe pilots. His own Swiss-made Breitling had been tucked inside a wooden box on his nightstand back home, where he had also left a handwritten letter. A love note, actually, to a woman who had captured his heart—just in case he never returned. But this was a time for war, not love. And he had to keep reminding himself of that.

Jean-Pierre slowed his gait as he left the town square and approached the town's major intersection. As he had been advised, a uniformed woman—her left arm ringed with a red armband and black swastika—directed traffic with a whistle and an attitude.

She was like no traffic cop he'd ever seen. Her full lips were colored with red lipstick. Black hair tumbled upon the shoulder epaulettes of the *Verkehrskontrolle*'s gray-green uniform. She wielded a silver-toned baton, directing a rambling assortment of horse-drawn carriages, battered sedans, and hulking military vehicles jockeying for the right of way. She looked no older than twenty-five, yet acted like she owned the real estate beneath her feet. Jean-Pierre couldn't help but let his lips curl up in a slight grin, knowing what was to come.

“*Entschuldigung, wo ist das Gemeindehaus?*” a voice said beside him. Jean-Pierre turned to the rotund businessman in the fedora and summer business suit asking for directions to City Hall.

“*Ich bin nicht sicher.*” He shrugged and was about to fashion another excuse when a military transport truck turned a corner two blocks away, approaching in their direction.

“*Es tut mir Leid.*” With a wave, Jean-Pierre excused himself and sprinted toward the uniformed traffic officer. In one quick motion, his Mauser was drawn.

He didn't break stride as he tackled the uniformed woman

to the ground. Her scream blasted his ear, and more cries from onlookers chimed in.

Jean-Pierre straddled the frightened traffic officer and pressed the barrel of his pistol into her forehead. Her shrieking immediately ceased.

“Don’t move, and nothing will happen to you.”

Jean-Pierre glanced up as he heard the mud-caked transport truck skid to a stop fifty meters from them.

A Wehrmacht soldier hopped out. “*Halt!*” He clumsily drew his rifle to his right shoulder.

Jean-Pierre met the soldier’s eyes and rolled off the female traffic officer.

A shot rang out. The German soldier’s body jerked, and a cry of pain erupted from his lips. He clutched his left chest as a rivulet of blood stained his uniform.

“Nice shot, Suzanne.” Jean-Pierre jumped to his feet, glancing at the traffic cop, her stomach against the asphalt with her pistol drawn.

Suzanne rose from the ground, crouched, and aimed. Her pistol, which had been hidden in an ankle holster, was now pointed at the driver behind the windshield. The determined look in her gaze was one Jean-Pierre had come to know well.

One, two, three shots found their mark, shattering the truck’s glass into shards. The driver slumped behind the wheel.

As expected, two Wehrmacht soldiers jumped out of the back of the truck and took cover behind the rear wheels. Before Jean-Pierre had a chance to take aim, shots rang out from a second-story window overlooking the intersection. The German soldiers crumbled to the cobblestone pavement in a heap.

“*Los jetzt!*” He clasped Suzanne’s hand, and they sprinted to the rear of the truck. Two black-leather-coated members of their resistance group had already beaten them there. Jean-Pierre couldn’t remember their names, but it didn’t matter.

What mattered was the safety of the prisoners in the truck. Jean-Pierre only hoped the contact's information had been correct.

With a deep breath, he lifted the curtain and peered into the truck. A half-dozen frightened men sat on wooden benches with hands raised. Their wide eyes and dropped jaws displayed their fear.

"Don't shoot!" one cried.

The sound of a police siren split the air.

"Everyone out!" Jean-Pierre shouted. "I'll take this one. The rest of you, go with them." He pointed the tip of his Mauser at the men in leather jackets.

The sirens increased in volume as the speeding car gobbled up distance along the Hauptstrasse, weaving through the autos and pedestrians. An officer in the passenger's seat leaned out, rifle pointed.

Jean-Pierre leaned into the truck and yanked the prisoner's arm. Suzanne grabbed the other. "Move it, come on!"

Bullets from an approaching vehicle whizzed past Jean-Pierre's ear. The clearly frightened prisoner suddenly found his legs, and the three sprinted away from the speeding car.

Jean-Pierre's feet pounded the pavement, and he tugged on the prisoner's arm, urging him to run faster. He could hear the screech of the tires as the police car stopped just behind the truck. Jean-Pierre hadn't expected the local Polizei to respond so rapidly.

They needed to find cover—

More gunfire erupted, and as if reading his thoughts, Suzanne turned the prisoner toward a weathered column.

Jean-Pierre crumbled against the pillar, catching his breath. The columns provided cover, but not enough. Soon the police would be upon them. They had to make a move. Only ten steps separated them from turning the street corner and sprinting into Helmut's watch store. From there, a car waited outside the back door.

Another hail of gunfire struck the plaster. Jean-Pierre mouthed a prayer under his breath.

“Suzanne, we have to get out of here!”

She crouched into a trembling ball, all confidence gone. “They’re surrounding us!” The terror in her uncertain timbre was clear. “But what can we do? We can’t let them see us run into the store.”

“Forget that. We have no choice!” Jean-Pierre raised his pistol and returned several volleys, firing at the two policemen perched behind a parked car.

“Listen to me,” he said to Suzanne, taking his eyes momentarily off the police car. “You have to go. You take this guy, and I’ll cover you. Once you turn the corner, it’s just twenty more meters to Helmut’s store.” His hands moved as he spoke, slamming a new clip of ammunition into his pistol.

“But what if—”

“I’ll join you. Now go!”

Jean-Pierre jumped from behind the protection of the column and rapidly fired several shots. One cop dared expose himself to return fire—not at Jean-Pierre but at the pair running for the corner.

No!

Jean-Pierre turned just in time to see Suzanne’s body lurch. The clean hit ripped into her flesh between the shoulder blades. She staggered for a long second before dropping with a thud. The gangly prisoner didn’t even look back as he disappeared around the corner.

I can’t lose him, Jean-Pierre thought, remembering again the importance of this mission. Yet to chase after the prisoner meant he’d have to leave his partner behind.

Suzanne . . .

He emptied his Mauser at the hidden policemen, ducking as he scrambled toward his partner. Sweeping up her bloody form, he managed to drag her around the corner to safety.

“Go,” Suzanne whispered.

“I can’t leave you. Stay with me—”

Her eyelids fluttered. “You need to go . . .” A long breath escaped, and her gaze fixed on a distant point beyond him.

Jean-Pierre dropped to his knees and ripped open Suzanne’s bloodstained woolen jacket. Her soaked chest neither rose nor fell. He swore under his breath and brushed a lock of black hair from her face.

Jean-Pierre cocked his head. Incessant gunfire filled the air. His colleagues were apparently keeping the German soldiers and local Polizei at bay, at least for the time being. He knew only a few valuable seconds remained to escape with the prisoner.

He planted a soft kiss on Suzanne’s forehead. “Until we see each other in heaven,” he whispered.

Jean-Pierre darted to a trash can, where the shaken prisoner had hunkered down, covering his head. The resistance fighter clutched the man’s left arm and hustled him inside the watch store, pushing past two startled women. The rear door was propped open, and a black Opel four-door idled in the alley. With a few quick steps, they were inside the vehicle.

Before the rear door was shut, the driver jerked the car into gear, and the Opel roared down the tight alley. The door slammed shut, and Jean-Pierre glanced back. No one followed. The car merged onto a busier street, and only then did Jean-Pierre sink in his seat and close his eyes.

Soon they’d arrive at a safe house pitched on the Rhine River. And later, with the dark night sky as their protection, a skiff would sneak them into the warm arms of Mother Switzerland—a skiff piloted by the mentor who’d recruited him. His *nom de guerre*: Pascal.

Jean-Pierre’s mission would soon be complete, but at what cost? Another agent—a good woman and a friend—had been sacrificed.

He had followed orders for the greater good, to save the life of a nameless prisoner. He only hoped this mission was worth it.