Several Key Nazis Took Poison During Closing Days of the War

By M. S. Handler

Soviet evidence that Hitler committed suicide with potassium cyanide in his Berlin bunker during the last days of the Third Reich has shed new light on the way of life of the Nazi leaders.

The ancient Greeks and Romans used poison as an instrument of national policy and in dynastic struggles. Poison was also used as an instrument of policy in Renaissance Italy, but at no time was it employed on so widespread a scale as during the Third Reich.

As the Nazi armies crumbled and retreated on the Eastern, Western, and Italian fronts and as the Allied armies approached German territory, Nazis in key positions received capsules of potassium cyanide with which they were to destroy themselves if faced with capture—by the Russians in particular.

The Nazi leaders who had pursued a policy of mass extermination in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe feared merciless retribution if they fell into Soviet hands.

Himmler Bites Capsule

Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS, the secret police, the criminal police, and finally Germany’s entire police system, committed suicide by biting a capsule of potassium cyanide when he was captured by the British.

Josif Gibbs, his wife and his six children all died of cyanide poisoning in the Berlin Bunker following Hitler’s suicide, the Soviet authorities have determined.

Field Marshal Hermann Göring avoided hanging after his conviction at the Nuremberg trial of war criminals by the use of potassium cyanide, which some believe had been smuggled into his cell.

Gen. Hans Krebs, Acting Chief of Staff in the final days, also destroyed himself by cyanide poison, according to the Soviet findings. In his study, "The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich," William L. Shirer reported that it was believed that General Krebs had shot himself.

In traditional European military annals, officers accused of betrayal were sometimes given the choice of suicide by re-