

Exquisite doesn't mean unobtainable . . .



THE "CREME DE LA CREME" OF NAZI EDGED WEAPONS

by LTC Thomas M. Johnson



COLLECTORS NEW TO THE ARMS FIELD may conclude that all the truly exotic and fine pieces, the real works of art, are safely and unobtainably on the shelves of museums in this country and abroad.

But one of the most magnificent specimens of Third Reich swords is not. It remains today in the possession of a private collector in Anderson, Indiana — George R. Canaday. For security reasons, Mr. Canaday finds it necessary to store his prize in a local bank vault, but he frequently shows it to serious edged weapon collectors if advance arrangements are made.

Mr. Canaday's sword is an exquisite, hand-crafted weapon made by the quality-conscious Carl Eickhorn arms factory in Solingen at the order of ranking members of the Luftwaffe. It was to commemorate the marriage of their commander-in-chief, Hermann Goring, to German actress Emmy Sonnemann on April 10, 1935. The wedding was to be a spectacular state affair, with Adolf Hitler in attendance, and Emmy would soon be tabbed by the American press as "The First Lady of the Reich."

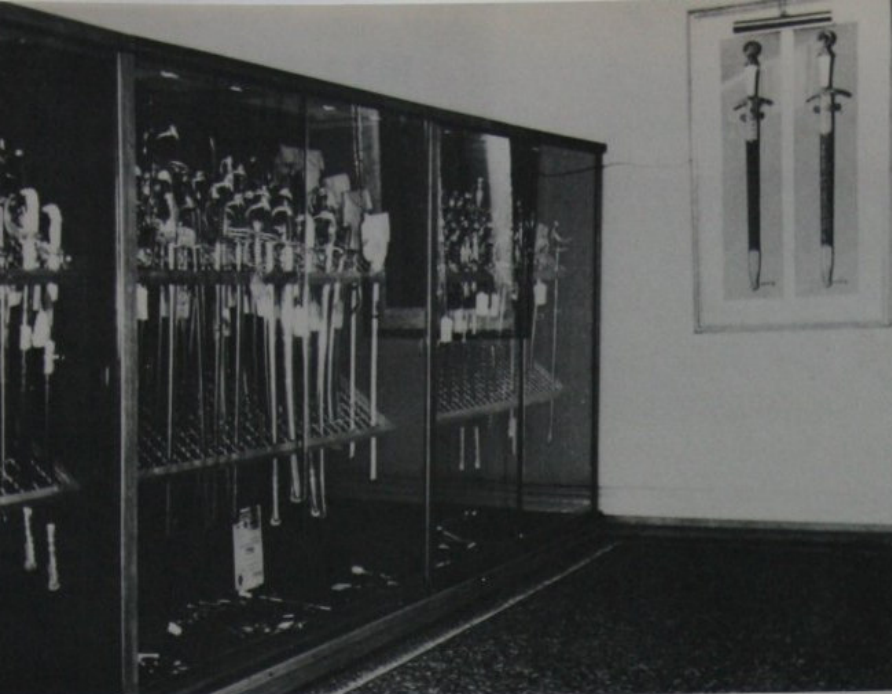
The massive sword combined Goring's infatuation with expensive material items and his acknowledged passion for edged weapons. It was a joint effort of the finest craftsmen the Eickhorn firm could assemble. Renowned swordsmith Paul Dingler was called upon to forge the ornate damascus blade which bears the raised gold dedication, "10 April 1935 - DIE REICHSLUFTWAFFE IHREM OBERBEFEHLSCHABER" (The National Air Force to

their Commander-in-Chief). The inscription on the reverse of the blade reads, "GETREN DEM FUHRER FOLK AND REICH" (Loyal to the Fuhrer for People and Nation). The damascus blade required Dingler months to complete and is truly exquisite. The master-craftsman's initials, "PD", are predominately displayed in gold alongside the standard Eickhorn squirrel logo on the ricasso of the blade. The second most eye-catching component of this premier weapon is the unusual pommel. The front of the Wedding Sword pommel features a representation of Goring's *Pour le Merite* ("Blue Max") presented for his heroic deeds during WWI. An air ace, he was later selected to command the elite "flying circus" made famous by Baron von Richthofen ("The Red Baron").

The reverse of the pommel depicts the Goring coat-of-arms, a mailed arm with the closed fist clutching a ring. The attractive hilt, which bears the Luftwaffe motif, was personally designed by Professor K. Dluzewski of Berlin, whose name is deeply engraved on the underside of the crossguard. The scabbard of the Wedding Sword was covered with a piece of royal blue sharkskin leather which, reputedly, Herr Eickhorn personally selected to match the brilliant blue color of Goring's Luftwaffe dress uniform (upon the suggestion of the image-conscious Hermann).

How this valuable piece of history has managed to remain in private hands is itself an interesting story. During his rise to becoming the highest ranking military





(George R. Canaday Collection)

(Above) This extremely rare photograph pictures the inside of the famous Carl Eickhorn Waffenfabrick (arms factory) during the Second World War. The Eickhorn firm proudly displayed a specimen of each edged weapon manufactured. The contents of these large glass showcases would be worth a fortune to collectors at today's market prices. Note the obvious pride that the Eickhorn factory placed in the production of the historical Göring Wedding Sword, as evidenced by the art rendering by famous artist Paul Casberg.



(Library of Congress Collection)

(Right) American flying hero Charles Lindbergh inspects the famous Wedding Sword at Göring's hunting retreat, Carinhall, on July 28, 1936.

man in the German armed forces and the "number 2 Nazi" directly in line of succession behind Adolf Hitler, Goring amassed a tremendous fortune of both money and possessions. Some references even credit Goring with becoming one of the richest men of his time. As the "Thousand Year" Reich began to crumble after a few shortlived years, the notorious Reichsmarshal elected to preserve his accumulated art treasures in a sealed concrete bunker hidden in the beautiful countryside surrounding Berchtesgaden. The fabulous cache (the 1945 estimated value was an astounding \$200 million!) was discovered by a U.S. Seventh Army counter-intelligence task force headed by Captain H. V. Anderson. The unit was searching the Bavarian countryside for hidden stores of bullion in May 1945 when the bunker was discovered. It took Captain Anderson's soldiers four entire days to empty the bunker of the priceless objects d'art. Witnessing original Rembrandt and Van Gogh paintings being loaded and transported in open U.S. Army trucks must have made art-lovers of the '40's wince in pain! The unbelievable loot included five Rembrandts, two Van Goghs, at least two Renoirs, ornate tapestries, stacks of solid gold tableware, medieval sculpture, religious wood carvings, gold candlesticks by the dozen, and countless other treasures including the Eickhorn Wedding Sword.

The quaint little Bavarian village of Unterstein near the Konigsee became a temporary world art center as the U.S. 101st Airborne Division ("Screaming Eagles") placed the dazzling Goring collection on public display in a run-down requisitioned hotel. A simple wooden sign, proclaiming "Hermann Goring's Art Collection Through the Courtest of 101st Airborne Division," was hung over the entrance to the hotel. Hardly a befitting environment for the largest private art collection in existence!

As one might surmise, the Wedding Sword was not a part of the Unterstein art exhibit. It had been immediately "liberated" by the American platoon sergeant who first entered the wartime "King Solomon's Mine." Soldiers have always been souvenir hunters, and Captain Anderson's GI's were no exception. What other items failed to make it to Unterstein are unknown. The Wedding Sword was crated and shipped to the United States as a war trophy and proudly displayed on a den wall until tracked down by noted edged weapon author James P. Atwood who purchased the "creme de la creme" and subsequently sold it to Canaday.

The story of the Goring Wedding Sword is by no means unique. The vast majority of the prized Third Reich edged weapons were either shipped or hand-carried to the U.S. as declared war trophies by returning veterans. And today, many more rare pieces still remain in private hands rather than in museum display cases.



Previously unpublished photograph of the contents of the Hermann Göring treasure cave discovered in May, 1945 near Berchtesgaden (see p. 268, Volume I). Many of the *objets d'art* pictured are in the collections of U.S. private collectors.

(LTC. Thomas M. Johnson photo collection)

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