

## Interview with Hitler's pilot in WBU archives

*MyPlainView*

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For many, the end of World War II was a lifetime ago. For others, the memories are still alive. For university students, the war is something that can be found only in history books and documentaries. But for students at Wayland Baptist University, the war has become more personal thanks to a recent donation of a recorded interview with Hans Baur, the personal pilot of Adolf Hitler.

Recorded by Command Sgt. Maj. James T. Hilyer in 1984, the interview came to Wayland nearly 30 years later due to a connection between family friends. Hilyer died in 2000. His son, J.T. Hilyer and his wife are friends with John Mark and Christina Spruill. Christina is the director of institutional research at Wayland.

The interview consisted of four tapes recorded in a single interview session. The tapes were donated to Wayland last spring, then were translated and added to the archives in time for students to use them when classes began on Aug. 21. Emeritus Professor of Languages and Literature Christa Smith translated the interview. Smith, who retired from full-time teaching in 2012, grew up in Germany during WWII. The interview was officially archived this summer, leading into the fall term for Wayland students.

"J.T.'s dad talked about the stories and things he had seen," Christina said. "It was just kind of a neat thing that he had these tapes."

Upon Hilyer's death, the family decided to donate the tapes. Spruill said they wanted them to go to a Christian university and not fall into the hands of people who might sympathize with Hitler.

"I was working for Dr. [Elane] Seebo at the time and asked her if this was something Wayland would like for history majors. She thought it would be great," Spruill said.

J.T. Hilyer donated the tapes to the university, asking only for a translated transcript of the interview in return. Smith, who has written about her vivid memories of those years in Germany, said listening to the interview was enlightening.

"I did learn things I didn't know," she said. "I also became aware of how many people were so caught up in the personality [of Hitler] that they didn't see the reality behind it."

Baur, who flew successful missions for the German military in WWI, became Hitler's personal pilot prior to the beginning of WWII. Baur was bunkered with Hitler when the Nazi leader committed suicide in 1945. He lived and traveled with Hitler, and according to Smith never wavered from thinking that Hitler would someday be recognized as a great man.

After Hitler's suicide, Baur was captured by Russian troops and spent many years in a Russian prison being tortured for information. He wrote several books about his experiences before dying in 1993.

J.T. Hilyer said his father met Baur through a photographer friend while stationed in Germany. Hilyer said the photographer, Peter Tiefenthaler, was commissioned to photograph Baur and asked his father to come along. Hilyer, who was a boy at the time, said his father visited Baur several times.

"He thought [Baur] was a pretty neat fellow," Hilyer said, explaining that his parents, along with Tiefenthaler and his wife, at times went to dinner with Baur.

"My dad worked at the military base with some other soldiers," Hilyer explained. "Most career soldiers are usually history bugs. There were a couple of other fellows that were about the same rank as my dad who wanted to just hang out and ask some questions. Tiefenthaler arranged the meeting."

Hilyer said his father recorded the meeting and the tapes had been in the family since then. Much of the interview, transcribed into a 26-page document, deals with Hitler's final days, his suicide and how Baur and others tried to dispose of the body. Baur also tells of how he came to work for Hitler who did not like to fly, but understood the importance of being able to move from one place to another quickly.

Dean of the School of Behavioral and Social Sciences Dr. Estelle Owens said the interview is a unique, archival document.

"No one else, to our knowledge, has this," Owens said. "It is with Hitler's private pilot who served him for a number of years. The guy knew [Hitler] very, very well. It's an apology for Hitler. [Baur] thinks the man was misunderstood, but that is his perspective and he has a right to his opinion."

Owens said the tapes will be placed in the university archives. Transcripts are available for researchers or anyone who is interested in the time period. People may also listen to the actual recording, which has been preserved digitally.

"It is available to anyone who is interested in World War II on the European front who wants to read about somebody who was very up close and personal with Hitler," Owens said. The interview was recorded on four cassette tapes, so portions are missing at times when it is believed the tapes were switched in the machine. The interview also ends abruptly as the tape cuts off mid-sentence.

For more information, contact the Mabee Learning Resources Center at 806-291-3700, or call the School of Behavioral and Social Sciences at 806-291-1170.