

Hess DNA: Round 14

From Andrew Rosthorn

To the Editor, *New Scientist*,
King's Reach Tower, Stamford Street, London SE1 9LS

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Questions Arising from the *New Scientist* article of January 22, 2019:

'Exclusive: DNA solves Rudolf Hess doppelgänger conspiracy theory'

Dear Ms Wilson,

I would like to bring to your attention an article published recently by one of the authors of the research paper that formed the basis of your news report of January 22, 2019, covering the paper published by *Forensic Science International: Genetics* 40 [2019] entitled 'Rudolf Hess – The Doppelgänger Conspiracy Theory Disproved'.

I wrote to you on October 14, 2019, establishing that although I had 'researched parliamentary questions to the British government in 1987' I had never taken one side or other in 'the long controversy about the identity of the prisoner'.

I tried to tell you that I had been 'surprised to find that neither the prisoner's former surgeon nor his former dentist had been convinced by the American and Austrian research reported in *New Scientist*'.

I asked *New Scientist* to consider dealing with questions posed by the former Army surgeon and the former Army dentist. I included a list of their questions in my letter but I did not receive a reply.

Dr Sherman McCall, one of the authors of the paper, has now stated in a recent article in the British magazine *Lobster* that the *New Scientist* article inaccurately described how the blood sample used in the Austrian DNA research was obtained.

New Scientist reported:

In 1982, a blood sample was taken from Hess by a US army doctor, Phillip Pittman, as part of a routine health check. A

pathologist, Rick Wahl, mounted some of the blood on a microscope slide to perform a cell count. The slide was labelled 'Spandau #7' and hermetically sealed, and kept by Wahl for teaching purposes at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington DC.

Dr McCall now says: 'Unfortunately, we erred in assuming Dr. Pittman drew the Hess sample.' Dr McCall cannot now state who took the sample or how it came into the hands of Dr Wahl.

The *New Scientist* also reported that McCall contacted Jan Cemper-Kiesslich, a molecular biologist in the DNA Unit at the department of legal medicine, University of Salzburg, Austria, and told him about the slide and the dried blood.

Dr McCall has now said that this did not happen. In his article in *Lobster* he says:

'We are very grateful for coverage by *New Scientist*. This first and most detailed news report formed the basis for subsequent worldwide coverage. Regrettably, a reporting error crept in owing to communication delays and intense competitive pressure in news. I did not, as reported by *New Scientist*, begin by contacting Dr. Cemper-Kiesslich to analyze the Hess sample.'

Dr. McCall has now been attempting to explain why the blood slide is contained in a British coverslip, a type not normally used by Dr Wahl, and sealed with a substance not customarily used by Dr Wahl. He can only surmise that 'the slide was probably processed in a US military medical facility'.

The *New Scientist* article stated that scientific research had settled a political controversy after 79 years. As a result of your magazine's scientific authority and your straightforward 'exclusive' headline, news broke worldwide on the tacit assumption that the both the science behind the research and the provenance of the blood sample were sound.

After reading Dr McCall's latest article, It seems to me that the editor of the *News Scientist* should at least acknowledge that no-one now knows who took the blood sample or exactly how it left Berlin and ended up in America inside a British coverslip of a type not used in continental Europe or America.

While determined not to take any side in the controversy about the true identity of the man tried at Nuremberg in 1946, I have attached for your information a much more complicated analysis of the provenance of

the blood sample. It was sent to me last week by Mr Hugh Thomas, formerly Major Hugh Thomas, the British Army surgeon who examined and treated the prisoner in Spandau.

It might also be fair for the *New Scientist* to point out that the new article by Dr McCall throws some doubt on the memory and ability of the former British army dentist Dr Hans Eirew who died in October last year and cannot therefore reply to Dr McCall's criticism.

Yours faithfully,