

Rapports de recherche

“Hitler’s Car” and the Canadian War Museum: Problems of Documentation and Interpretation

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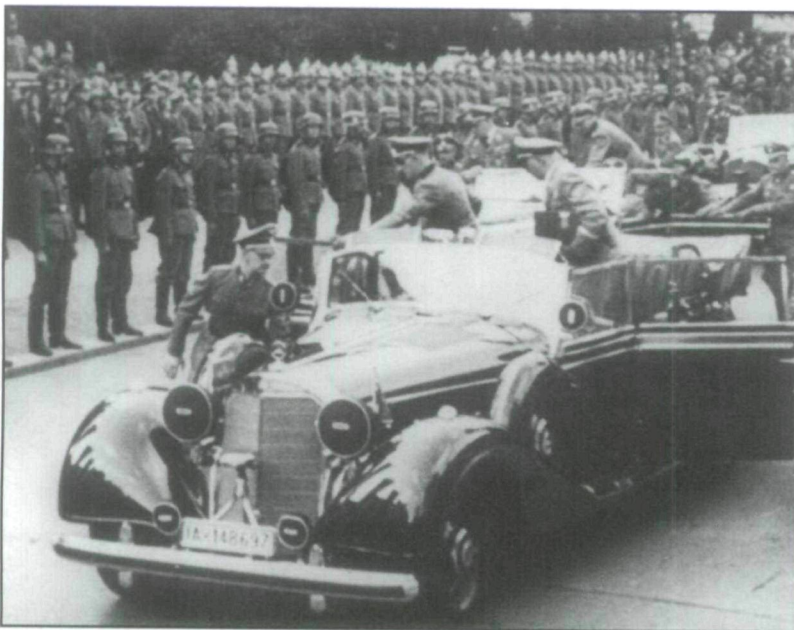
One of the best known and also most problematic artifacts on display at the Canadian War Museum (CWM) is the black Grosser Mercedes automobile that was once used by Adolf Hitler. When the car came to the CWM in 1970 it was believed to have belonged to Hitler’s Deputy *Führer* and *Luftwaffe* commander Hermann Goering. But then a critical piece of research, undertaken by CWM librarian Ludwig Kosche, and published in the magazine *After the Battle* in 1982, revealed conclusively that the car had belonged to Hitler.¹ Kosche’s study is thorough, meticulous, and indisputable, and it transformed the significance of the artifact. An object of moderate interest when associated with the second-ranking Nazi leader, it became one of intense fascination when associated with the arch-villain behind the whole Nazi enterprise, the *Führer* himself.

The story of the car has been well told by Kosche. The following will, in the main, be concerned with its story as an artifact at the Canadian War Museum. It will focus on the manner of its acquisition, the nature of its “restoration,” the problems of its documentation, and the difficulties inherent in its exhibition. As such, it should serve as an interesting case study of artifact acquisition and research in what must be seen now as a markedly aggressive era in the history of museum collecting, and as an illumination of the approach the CWM has taken over the years to the documentation and the presentation of this particularly contentious artifact.

The CWM’s vehicle is a Grosser Mercedes 770 W 150 of which Daimler Benz of Stuttgart produced three versions between 1938 and 1943. The first was unarmoured; the second was armoured; and the third was a larger more powerful version termed a *Staatskarosse*. The CWM’s car is one of the second, armoured, versions. Weighing 4100 kilograms, it was powered by a 230-horsepower engine, and could produce top speeds of between 145 and 150 km/h. The doors were armoured, the windows were 2.5-centimetre-thick bullet-proof glass, and a 0.6-centimetre-thick armour plate could be raised behind the rear passenger seat. There are separate front seats for a driver and a passenger, and a bench style rear passenger seat. In addition, immediately behind the front seats are three folding jump seats to hold additional passengers if required. There is one compartment in the front dashboard and two in the rear seat for holding pistols.

The car has a number of features that, according to Kosche, have “so far not been found in photographs of other Grosser Mercedes 770 W 150.” These are: “an ornamental hole in the radiator; four vents directly beneath the wind screen; two door hinges on either side ... short,

Fig. 1
Hitler arrives at the Krolloper, the substitute Reichstag, Berlin, in Mercedes 1A^V148697, 19 July 1940. This is the car currently on display at the Canadian War Museum. (Bundesarchiv Koblenz)



curved side rear windows; and twenty cooling-slits on both sides of the central hinge on top of the bonnet."² These distinctive features, together with the car's one surviving registration plate at the rear, were eventually to enable Kosche to confirm that the car had been one of Hitler's, not Goering's.

The CWM acquired the vehicle in May 1970 from Quebec City businessman and entrepreneur Claude Pratte for a gift tax receipt. He had purchased it some years previously from H. J. O'Connell, a Montreal collector, who in turn had acquired it in an auction at the American Army's Aberdeen Proving Ground in Maryland in November 1956 for \$2,725 (American). O'Connell had hired R. J. Rumble of Rumble Motors in Toronto to do the bidding, and after its purchase the car was shipped to the firm's Toronto premises, where a further \$5,000 (Canadian) was spent on an extensive "restoration."³

The car was well known at the time as Goering's staff car. It had been associated with the Luftwaffe commander virtually since its capture by the Americans in May 1945. Sergeant T. Joe Azara of the 20th Armored Division had found the car sitting on a flatbed in a railway siding in the village of Laufen just north of Salzburg, Austria. After a short fire fight with some German snipers, Azara secured the car, removed it from the flatbed, and soon had it running. (He soon, however, had to replace the original engine with another of the same power removed from a Mercedes found at Hitler's retreat at Berchtesgaden, located just to the north of Laufen across the Austrian-Bavarian frontier.)⁴

From a reading of the 20th Armored Division's newspaper, *The Dispatch*, Kosche attributes the association of the car with Goering to a statement made at the time by a Dutch civilian worker in a garage near where the car was captured. He claimed that the car was being shipped from Berchtesgaden, "because it was out of gas, and even Goering could get no more."⁵ Kosche concludes that this rather ambiguous statement was the origin of the car's becoming identified with the portly *Reichsmarschall*. Whatever the case, after the car was shipped to the United States in August 1945, it was used as the centre piece of a number of war bond drives identified as "Goering's Personal Car."⁶

In October 1956, it was put up for auction, after having spent the previous nine years in storage with the Property Disposal Office



Fig. 2
Mercedes 1A^V148697, on display in Washington, D.C., April 1946, mistakenly identified as Goering's car. Note that it had been repainted black by this time. Note also the cracking in the side window, which is still in place on the car today. (US Army)

of the American military. Again it was advertised as one of Goering's cars, and was apparently acquired by H. J. O'Connell with this understanding. Another car sold at the same sale was one of two Mercedes that had been captured by the 101st Airborne. It was a 1943 Mercedes that its captors had termed the "Blue Goose," which had indeed belonged to Goering. R. J. Rumble evidently assumed that his car was the *other* Mercedes known to have been captured by the 101st. Since the other car taken by the 101st was known to be a Staatskarosse, Rumble based his "restoration" of his own car upon a photograph that he had available of a Staatskarosse. The result was the centre light mounted on the curved bar above the front fender, which the CWM's car never had originally.⁷

The car purchased by Rumble had suffered some gunshot damage. Bullets had pierced the armour plate at the back, and the dashboard had also been hit. In addition there were three bullet holes in the front wind screen with some cracking, and the right passenger windscreen was badly splintered. It had long been believed that this damage had been inflicted after the war by trigger happy G.I.s at the Aberdeen Proving Ground, anxious to test the effectiveness of the car's armour plate. However, Kosche has shown conclusively, again by reading *The Dispatch*, that this damage had in fact *already been inflicted at the time of the vehicle's capture in May 1945*. How or when it was done is not certain. One can only note that the car had been sitting on a railway flatbed for some time in what was clearly a combat zone.⁸ Work carried out by CWM conservator Leslie Redman in 1996 on the leather seats has

revealed gun-shot damage especially to the left rear and to the jump seats. Indeed a reinforcement bar in the latter was found to have a large elliptically-shaped hole blown in it, leading to some speculation by CWM staff that it was caused by a fairly large projectile, as from an aircraft.⁹ Whatever the case, attempts were made to repair most of this damage during R. J. Rumble's "restoration" of 1956, except for that in the windows. As Rumble explained to CWM Director Lee Murray: "Mr O'Connell required everything to be restored to its original condition except the windows, which he felt lent more authenticity to the war action the car had seen."¹⁰

Rumble also drew attention to the fact that the car had had a total of eighteen layers of paint applied to it. These were said to alter "from black to 'Luftwaffe green' — the car being repainted for state events or for field trips." The presence of the so-called "Luftwaffe green," of course, lent credence to the story of the car having belonged to Goering.¹¹

As these alternating layers of black and so-called Luftwaffe Green paint were subsequently cited frequently in support of the notion that the car belonged to Goering, Kosche's own thoughts on the matter are worth recounting before proceeding further. He concludes that although the "car had undoubtedly a few layers of paint, the two uppermost being American in origin ... [t]here is ... no support for this story." He quotes a driver who sometimes drove for Hitler to the effect that "to the best of his knowledge, none of the cars were given camouflage paint — there being no other explanation for the alleged 'Luftwaffe green'." Indeed, the type of vehicle possessed by the CWM was not usually used for field trips at all, which instead were the domain of another type of Mercedes, the much heavier six-wheeled Mercedes 770-G. "In any event," observes Kosche, "it is more likely that the colour would have been Army green rather than Luftwaffe grey."¹²

Claude Pratte offered the car to the CWM towards the end of October 1969. As Lee Murray wrote to his superior, Dr William Taylor, Director of the National Museum of Man*, on 3 November: "A gentleman from Quebec City has offered to make available to us, either by loan or gift, Field Marshal Goering's Staff car." Murray considered it to be "a very valuable historical item, and its acquisition would be very timely as it could become one of the chief features of our V-E Day display."¹³

*Currently the Canadian Museum of Civilization

This appears to have been the only justification necessary for the CWM to acquire the car. Like many other museums at this time the CWM had no acquisitions policy and no formally constituted collections committee that vetted artifacts proposed to be brought into the collection. Indeed, the CWM had only moved into its new museum quarters at 330 Sussex Drive in Ottawa two years earlier. With only 67 000 artifacts in the collection, the primary impetus amongst museum staff at the time was to increase this number, the result being the close to half a million objects that the CWM has in its collection today. Inevitably, a large number of items came into the collection in this era that, while they were related to the general theme of warfare in the twentieth century, lacked that specific association with Canada's involvement in this warfare that has become the prime concern of today's collecting priorities. Examples are a large number of Soviet artillery pieces, two early marks of German Panzers, an Italian Carro Veloce 33 "tankette," and a turret off an American M-48 tank, none of which have any specifically Canadian reference at all. Probably the most prominent and well-known example, however, is Goering's, later, Hitler's, car.¹⁴

Pratte himself wrote on 10 November enclosing details of "Goering's bullet proof car that were given to me when I bought the car from Mr H. J. O'Connell."¹⁵ As these materials were very skimpy, however, over the following number of months the CWM attempted to obtain more information about the car, and also to find someone qualified to do the evaluation that was necessary to issue a gift tax receipt. It is interesting to note that almost from the beginning the CWM seems to have not been prepared to accept the car's attribution to Goering at face value, and looked for some means of associating it with Hitler. Thus in a letter to R. J. Rumble of 14 November 1969, requesting whatever additional information he had on the car, Lee Murray wrote: "In collaboration with the owner of the Second World War German Staff car that was reputed to have belonged to Adolf Hitler ... this Museum is attempting to piece together the history of the car and to evaluate its present worth — both as an antique car and as a relic of the Second World War."¹⁶ Note that there is no reference at all in this letter to the car's established reputation as having been associated with Goering. And a letter written a few months later to the potential evaluator, E. A. Jurist,

President of the Vintage Car Store of New York, N.Y., Murray wrote: "This is one of seven [cars] delivered to German Army Headquarters in 1940, and which have since become known as 'Hitler' cars because it was in one or more of these large, armour-plated, open touring limousines that the German leader usually rode on ceremonial occasions." This letter noted only that the car was "reported to have been assigned to Field Marshal Goering." Whether there were solid historical reasons for such doubts, or whether they arose from wishful thinking is not certain, although one suspects the latter. For his part, Rumble attempted to correct what he perceived to be Murray's deviancy on the issue by repeating the received mythology: "There were seven of these units purchased in 1940 by the German Army Headquarters and this particular car was then issued to Goering, not Adolf Hitler as stated in the first paragraph of your letter. These facts were substantiated by the serial number, etc. and [sic] was used as his personal staff car."¹⁷

Rumble did supply one piece of critical information that up to that point had not been known — the car's factory serial number of 429334. He had taken it down, along with other technical data, off a plate attached to the car's bulkhead firewall. This discovery was "a big breakthrough," wrote Murray, and he immediately had it cabled off to the Daimler-Benz plant in Stuttgart hoping to receive more detailed information on the history of the car.¹⁸ The German Company did not respond, however, with Murray commenting wryly in a letter to Pratte of 29 January 1970: "I have noticed a reluctance in many Germans to admit they were around at all during the Second World War, and have a feeling that the same is true of this company."¹⁹ Finally, when by 11 February they had still not heard, Murray wrote for help to the German ambassador in Ottawa, Dr J. F. Ritter. "The Museum is extremely interested in a Mercedes Benz type 770 car which is in Canada," he wrote:

It is one of seven of these magnificent vehicles which were purchased by German Army Headquarters in 1940 and issued for service. The one that we are interested in is vehicle number 429334 and carries the original military license plate [sic] 1A^V148697. [Note that the license plate number was known this early, despite claims by Kosche that it was not revealed until 1980.] Part of the legend surrounding the car is that it was assigned for the use of Reichs Marshal Gœring [sic].²⁰

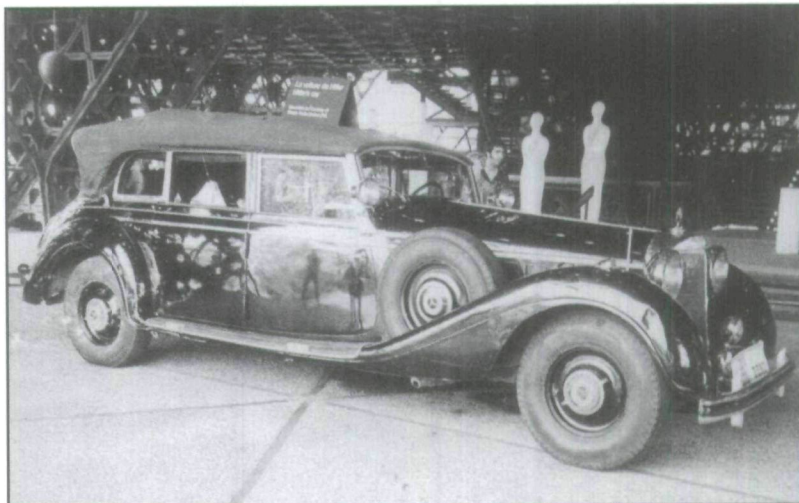


Fig. 3
Mercedes 1A^V148697 on display at the Man and His World exhibition in Montreal, 1970. Note that here it is identified as Hitler's car, even though the balance of historical opinion at the time was that it had belonged to Goering. (Ville de Montréal, Records Management and Archives)

This at last produced results. The Embassy contacted the Ministry of Defence in Bonn, which in turn approached Mercedes Benz. The result was the first substantiated piece of historical documentation that was ever acquired on the car. The Embassy's military attaché, Colonel G. E. Stamp, wrote to Murray on 12 June:

It was confirmed by Mercedes Benz, Stuttgart, that the car in question had been delivered to the adjutancy of Adolf Hitler on 8 July 1940. It could not been [sic] found out whether the car had been used by Hermann Gœring himself, but it is possible.

Additionally they found that the car had been sent to Daimler-Benz Company for repairs on 19 April, 1943 and was returned to Adolf Hitler's adjutancy again on 15 September 1943.

A photocopy of the factory worksheet was enclosed.²¹

In the meantime, a number of correspondents had been expressing doubts concerning the car's presumed affiliation with Hermann Goering. Thus on 17 February, when delivering his evaluation, Jurist contended that a:

... mistaken impression which has gained publicity is that each of the high-ranking members of the military and political staff of the Third Reich was assigned a particular 770K. Nothing could be further from the truth. The government provided car pools for visiting dignitaries who drew vehicles from these pools during their various visits to areas where parades or other public or private events were being held. However, several cars were assigned for Hitler's use ...²²

On 16 June, the CWM's deputy chief curator, Ralph Manning, described the car in a briefing note for Olive Dickason, then of the Public Relations office of the National Museum of Man, as a "Mercedes Benz armoured staff car that was delivered to the adjutancy of Adolf Hitler on 8 July 1940 — one of the famous 'Hitler' staff cars." Manning evidently felt no need to draw attention to the car's association with Goering.

As has been seen, the CWM's acquisition of the car was completed on 15 May 1970, when Pratte was sent his gift tax receipt. The vehicle was not delivered to the CWM until September, as in the interim, at the special request of Mayor Jean Drapeau, it was put on show at the *Man and His World* exhibition in Montreal, a carry-over from the famous World Exposition of three years earlier. It is interesting to note that here it was displayed without qualification as "Hitler's Car."²³

Despite the tendencies noted above to dissociate the car from Goering, when finally put on display at the CWM the vehicle was identified as "Goering's Staff Car." The caption, written by resident CWM historian, John Swettenham, repeated the known fact that it was delivered to Hitler's headquarters on 8 July 1940. It then introduced the slight qualification that "it is said to have been issued to Reichsmarschall Goering." It did, however, repeat the stories of its having had eighteen coats of paint, with Luftwaffe green for field trips and black for state occasions, and that it had been captured in 1945 by the 101st Airborne Division.²⁴ Although there already were some doubts about these stories, both outside and inside the CWM, and in retrospect we know that this information was almost completely false, in fairness it must be said that the caption did reflect the prevailing weight of "expert" opinion on the car to that date. Evidently prepared to be hung for a sheep as for a lamb on the issue, the CWM even went to the trouble of putting fake number or registration plates on the car with the number WL-148697 — the initials WL being those of the Luftwaffe! This included painting this bogus number over the number on the car's one original registration plate at the rear!

On 14 September 1971 the CWM received a letter from Ottawa resident Collett Calverley casting further doubt on the association of the car with Goering. Calverley wrote expressly "to contest the claim that the vehicle was used by Reichsmarschall Hermann Goering."

Although avowing that it was "always unpleasant to shatter delusions" he drew attention to the fact that the British already had a Mercedes, captured at Bad Homburg in 1945, that they claimed to have been Goering's. And noting that the British car had three door hinges, whereas the CWM's had only two, he argued: "Assuming the Nazi hierarchy was supplied 'from the top down,' and assuming there was a valid reason for changing the number of door hinges on the series of vehicles ... would it not be reasonable to conclude that the earlier models were more heavily armoured than later ones and that the Canadian one would fall into a more lightly armoured, later, and therefore more junior position in the series."²⁵

Despite the weakness of Calverley's arguments his letter seems to have provoked a momentary flurry of doubt and reappraisal within the CWM. Thus Manning wrote to Murray on 17 September:

You know my feelings on the so-called "Goering" car we have. We have nothing to link it to him; nor do we have any worthwhile supporting evidence for its having been painted Luftwaffe green. This legend originated with Rumble Motors in Toronto, who did the overhaul in Toronto, and they wouldn't know Luftwaffe green from Wehrmacht green. I did at one time suggest a method by which the colour might be tested but [a staff member's] sickness has kept it from being pursued.

Should not John S[wettenham] prepare the reply — he prepared the caption?

Murray replied back two days later: "Ask John to prepare reply and maybe we should make our own test as suggested by you."²⁶

Manning's plan as outlined to Swettenham in mid-November involved the removal of a paint chip from the car and then comparing it with a chip from another item in the collection "known to be still painted with Luftwaffe green." He also asked Swettenham to "carry the ball on this." Swettenham responded testily to Lee Murray on 23 November:

1. *Ralph can hardly fob this one off on me.*
2. *He ... was behind this project all through. You will recall that it was Hitler's car until he changed it to Goering's at a meeting.*
3. *I wrote the label from research material which he supplied and there is a note of caution in it — the car "is said to have been issued" to Goering.*

Swettenham's remarks suggest that CWM staff had been on the verge of identifying the car with Hitler, and that it was only Manning's reservations that prevented them from doing so. If this indeed was the case then Manning, who had strong personal doubts of his own about the attribution of the car to Goering, was clearly not yet willing to let these doubts influence the historical message that the museum presented about the car to the public.

Meanwhile, the CWM's letter to Calverley of 5 November, presumably written by Swettenham but bearing Murray's signature, pointed out that "we have been careful to caption this specimen as 'said to have been issued to Hermann Göring' — which may seem somewhat disingenuous in light of the fact that the caption was headed 'Goering's Staff Car'." Swettenham went on to observe that the possibility of the car being Goering's was "enhanced" by its having alternate coats of black and Luftwaffe green paint, "thus supporting the premise that it was used by a high Air Force officer when visiting units in the field."

Whether or not the test on the paint chips was ever carried out is not recorded. In any case, Swettenham's caption, identifying the car as Goering's, was that which visitors to the CWM continued to read for the next decade, and the artifact continued to be known to most, both inside and outside the museum, as Goering's car. Indeed, the February 1974 British periodical *After the Battle* ran an article on the car entitled "Hermann Goering's Mercedes Benz." This article repeated most of the myths and legends that had accumulated concerning the car that linked it to Goering, and a photograph clearly shows the CWM's faked registration plate of WL-148697.²⁷ Eight years later this same publication was to carry Ludwig Kosche's corrected version, that for the first time told the real story of the car.

Although his official position was as the CWM's librarian, Kosche had an M.A. in History besides his library degree and while at the CWM his interests went well beyond the holdings of the library. He was perhaps especially well suited for a study of the Mercedes, in that he was of German origin, and his command of the language permitted a thorough sifting of German sources.

By November 1979 plans were afoot to move the car from the CWM's Third Floor to the Second Floor Galleries. Victor Suthren, then the museum's chief of exhibits, noted in a memorandum to museum historian Bernard



Fig. 4
Sitting in the passenger seat of Mercedes 1A^V148697, Hitler arrives at the Zeughaus, Berlin, 15 March 1942. (US National Archives NA 242-HLB-6129-12)

Pothier of 1 November that it "seems to need a new caption," and asked Pothier to undertake it.²⁸ When completed, Pothier's own caption contained no reference to Goering at all, which probably reflected growing doubts on this point amongst CWM staff. Instead it was entitled simply "German Staff Car, 1940–45." While it contained no specific references to the Reichsmarschall, the new caption did, nonetheless, repeat the hoary old tale of its being painted with eighteen alternating coats of Luftwaffe green and black paint, to be "used alternatively for Luftwaffe field inspections and for state occasions." And its capture was still attributed to the 101st Airborne Division.²⁹

In his comments on the caption, Ralph Manning reverted to suggested emphases that he had not raised since the car had been first acquired back in 1970. "Could we not get in here that this is one of the so-called 'Hitler staff cars' of which there were eight?" he asked Pothier on 11 January 1980. He then went on to repeat his earlier opinion that "This Luftwaffe green was made up out of whole cloth by the car dealer in Toronto ..." ³⁰ And earlier, probably in response to a memo from Lee Murray questioning the absence of any reference to Goering in the caption, Manning wrote: "we have been unable to come up with one tittle of evidence that our German staff car had any particular relationship to the Field Marshal. I think we should drop the reference in any caption."³¹

It was probably concerns such as these that inspired Kosche to begin his research on the car. Kosche was helped immeasurably by an action the CWM took in 1980 before he began to work. The layer of paint that had been applied to the car's original registration plate at the back was removed to reveal the original number underneath — 1A^V148697. (Although in fact the number had only been obscured since the car was first put on exhibition in 1971, and the CWM had been well aware of it before then.) The uncovering of this number was to prove crucial to Kosche, and was to enable him, along with the car's original factory production number, to search out more specific information on the car than anybody had found before. He was to prove conclusively that it had in fact been used by Hitler himself and not by Goering.

Kosche's investigations revealed that the 1A in the registration number denoted a Berlin location, and that the superscript letter v (in red) became mandatory soon after the outbreak of war in September 1939 for all vehicles that were *not* affiliated with such official bodies as the army, airforce, police, and postal service. This was in fact proof that the car was not used by the military, and perhaps most significantly for our purposes, not by the Luftwaffe.

Furthermore, and probably most helpfully, Kosche discovered a number of photographs showing Hitler actually riding in the car. One, taken eleven days after the car's arrival at the Reichs Chancellery, shows the Nazi leader riding in its front passenger seat on his way to make a speech at the Kroll Opera House, the substitute *Reichstag*. All the physical details of this car are similar to the CWM's, except minor ones that could easily have been altered

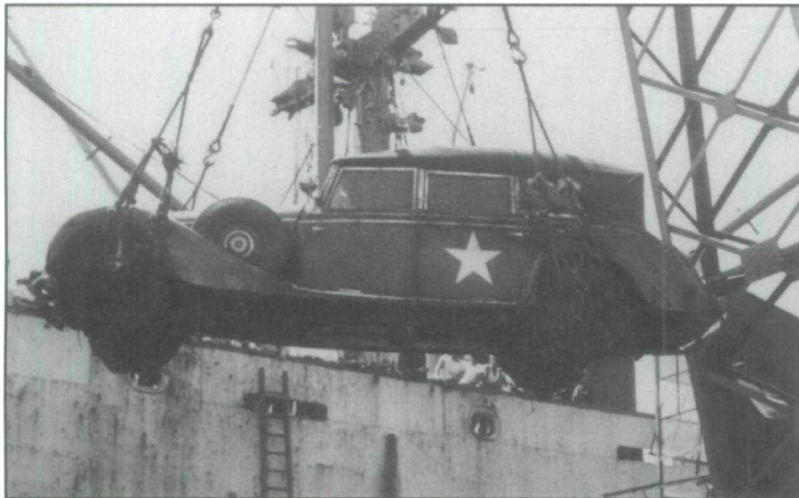
later, such as black out lights and metal covers for the spare tires, and the registration number 1A^V148697 clearly visible.³² Other photographs show Hitler using the car on 10 September 1941 during a visit to Marienbad to meet the visiting ruler of Hungary, Admiral Horthy; on 28 November 1941 when he attended the funeral of the fighter ace Werner Mölders; and on 15 March 1942 when he arrived at the *Zeughaus* in Berlin to make an address. The latter is the last known occasion that Hitler used the car.

The next documented reference is for 19 April 1943 when, as noted, it was sent back to the Daimler-Benz plant for repairs. There is no record of what the problem was, and the vehicle was returned to the Reichs Chancellery on 15 September. Thereafter all references to it ceased until it was captured by Sergeant Azara at Laufen, in May 1945.³³

Azara was able to use the car only briefly before it was taken over by one of his superior officers of the 20th Armored Division, Brigadier General Cornelius Daly. For the latter's use it was painted olive drab and provided with the marking of a large white star, which was the distinguishing mark born by all vehicles used in the Western Allied armies. It is interesting to note that recent conservation work has revealed the "barely visible outline of a star" in the centre of the fabric roof, its presence being verified by infra-red photography. This doubtless dates from its period of use by General Daly, and confirms that this roof is the original.³⁴ These were the colours and markings the car bore when it was shipped to the United States.

After its arrival in Boston on 8 August 1945, an article in that city's *Daily Globe* was headlined: "Goering's Auto Bullet Proof to protect Fat Marshal's Hide." The newspaper ran some photographs of the car, one of which, showing the dashboard and the inside surface of the windscreen, appeared later in the *Newsweek* magazine of 20 August. The caption noted that "there were three broken points on the windscreen with veins or cracks running from each, unquestionably where someone had taken a pot-shot at Hermann or some American G.I. had tried to find out if that glass were really bullet proof." Clearly the damage evident in the photograph exactly matches that on the windscreen of the CWM's car today, confirming that the two cars were indeed one and the same. In addition, the reading on the car's broken odometer upon its arrival in the United States was 13 900 kilometres, precisely the same as

Fig. 5
Painted American army khaki from its use by General Cornelius Daly of the 20th Armored Division, Mercedes 1A^V148697 is unloaded from a troopship at Boston, August 1945. (US Army 222379)

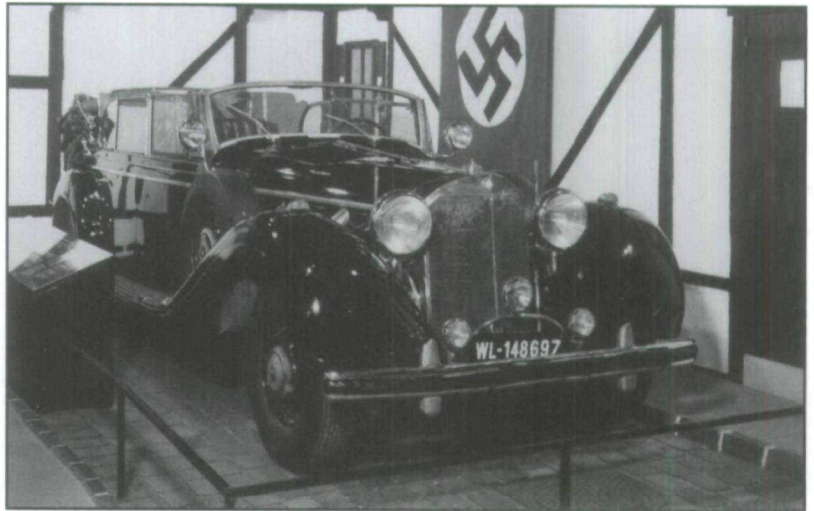


that on the CWM's car, the gauge evidently having never been subsequently repaired.³⁵

The car's subsequent history has been outlined above, from its sale at the Aberdeen Proving Ground in 1956 to a Canadian collector, its donation for a tax receipt to the CWM in 1970, and the subsequent quandaries experienced within the museum as to the precise history of the car. Kosche's article, which answered most historical questions about the car, and firmly identified it with Adolf Hitler, was published in February 1982. The wheels of CWM bureaucracy revolved slowly, however, and it was not until a year and a half later that revisions were made to the caption that accompanied the car in the galleries, which still linked it to Goering. The new caption, which was ready in April 1984, finally identified the car with Hitler. "Photographic evidence shows that Adolf Hitler made use of it at least until 1942," it read, and its capture was at last correctly attributed to the U.S. 20th Armored.

Work then proceeded on constructing an exhibit space deemed appropriate to the display of the newly significant artifact. In September 1986 its opening was announced, and Kosche's discoveries about the car emphasized, in a CWM press release. "A Bavarian streetscape and two German officers provide a new backdrop for the Canadian War Museum's 7.7 litre Grosser Mercedes," it proclaimed. "Once attributed to Hermann Goering, the sleek Daimler-Benz armoured convertible has now been positively identified as Adolf Hitler's personal staff car ... Archival research by a former librarian has matched the car's original number plate (later overpainted) with the German police registration number 1A^V148697."

The car sits in the CWM's Second Floor Gallery in front of its mock Bavarian Streetscape to this day. A visually striking and impressive artifact, it is one that visitors to the museum tend to remember — not infrequently to the exclusion of anything else. Thus in an interview with J. L. Granatstein just before he took up his appointment as CWM Director General and Chief Executive Officer in mid-1998, it was the only CWM artifact that CBC Ottawa host John Lacharity could remember. Moreover, in an article on the holdings of Ottawa Museums published in April 1998, the *Globe and Mail* chose to run a photo of it in preference to all the other artifacts that the CWM has on display.³⁶ It is doubtful that the car would have the same effect if it were still identified as belonging to Goering.



Thus while the artifact itself remained the same, its identification with Hitler not only greatly increased its monetary value, but transformed its significance, both for the museum itself and for the visiting public. It is not, of course, that the car as an artifact provided any more insight into the nature of Hitler's persona or policies than it did into Goering's. But its positive identification as a car that had been used by the Führer himself imputed to it new meanings and levels of significance that transcended its status as a car, even one with a known Nazi provenance. This, of course, takes us beyond material history as we know it, and closer perhaps to the world of the personality cult and the collector. Still it is a constant of museum life that, however intrinsically fascinating a piece is in its own right, a perceived association with a famous or infamous figure tends to enhance its interest to the public. And this in turn can provide the museum with a useful tool that can help to explain historical developments and the unfolding of historical events.

This is what the CWM hoped it could do with Hitler's car. By situating the car against the setting of the Bavarian streetscape, replete with other tangible icons of the Nazi era, such as swastika banners and a mannequin in an SS uniform, it hoped to focus attention on the rise of Nazism and its significance for the origins of the Second World War. But the presence of the sleek black roadster and the accompanying Nazi paraphernalia was in fact criticized for glamorizing the Nazi regime. And doubtless the car and the exhibit did evoke what might be termed the Leni Riefenstahl view of Hitler, with its emphasis on adulating crowds,

Fig. 6
The Mercedes on display in front of the mock Bavarian streetscape, Second Floor Galleries, Canadian War Museum, ca 1986. The car still bears CWM's fake registration plate of WL for Luftwaffe. (CWM)

torchlight parades, and Nuremberg rallies, more than on the Hitler of military aggression, racist politics, and the Holocaust. The Museum responded to these criticisms eight years ago by adding a backdrop of photographs from the death camps to emphasize the horrific consequences of Hitler and Naziism. Yet, as noted, the car is a powerful enough presence that it is still the memory of it, and its associations with Hitler, that often predominate amongst visitors' recollections of the museum — possibly an uncomfortable reminder of the fascination that items associated with Hitler and the Third Reich continue to exert.

As has been seen, the car was acquired in an earlier more free-wheeling and opportunistic era in the history of museum collecting. It probably would not be acquired today, when much more tightly focused collecting policies are the rule. The specific mandate of the

CWM, of course, is Canadian military history, with which Hitler's car has only a minimal association. The car can in ways be seen as a testament to the possible pitfalls inherent in displaying artifacts obtained under less focused circumstances, especially if, like Hitler's car, they have prominent and evocative associations with important historical developments that go beyond the specific thematic emphasis of the museum. If not handled carefully, they can draw unwanted attention, possibly at the expense of the museum's main message. The problem for the CWM, then, remains that of reconciling the car's undoubted visual impact and interest to visitors with the equally undoubted interpretative and pedagogical problems that its presence in the museum creates. It remains to be seen whether such reconciliation can be achieved.

NOTES

1. Ludwig Kosche, "Story of a Car," *After the Battle* (1982): 1–13.
2. *Ibid.*, 2.
3. CWM Artifact File 19700158-001, R. J. Rumble, Rumble Pontiac Buick Ltd, Toronto, to L. F. Murray, CWM, 27 November 1969.
4. Kosche, "Story of a Car," 4.
5. *Ibid.*, 5.
6. *Ibid.*, 7–8.
7. *Ibid.*, 9.
8. *Ibid.*, 4–5.
9. See CWM Conservation File, Condition Report and Treatment Record, 12700158 Grosser Mercedes, Leslie Redman, 23 October 1996.
10. CWM Artifact File 19790158-001, R. J. Rumble to L. F. Murray, 27 November 1969.
11. Kosche, "Story of a Car," 9. Unfortunately, the letter where Rumble makes the claim about the eighteen layers of paint is missing from CWM files.
12. *Ibid.*
13. CWM Artifact File, 19700158-001, Lee Murray to Dr W. E. Taylor, re *Field Marshal Goering's Staff Car*, 3 November 1969.
14. For more on this era in the history of CWM collecting see Cameron Pulsifer, "The Canadian War Museum: Past, Present, and Future?", 20 March 1998, unpublished manuscript on file, CWM.
15. *Ibid.*, Claude Pratte to R. V. Manning, CWM, 10 November 1969.
16. *Ibid.*, L. F. Murray to Rumble Motors, Toronto, 14 November 1969.
17. *Ibid.*, R. J. Rumble to L. F. Murray, 27 November 1969.
18. *Ibid.*, L. F. Murray to R. J. Rumble, 2 December 1969; Canadian War Museum to Daimler Benz, Stuttgart, Cablegram, 2 December 1969.
19. *Ibid.*, L. F. Murray to Claude Pratte, 29 January 1970.
20. *Ibid.*, L. F. Murray to His Excellency Dr J. F. Ritter, Ambassador of Germany, 11 February 1970.
21. *Ibid.*, G. E. Stamp. Col. Air, Military and Naval Attaché, German Embassy, Ottawa, to Canadian War Museum, 12 June 1970.
22. *Ibid.*, E. A. Jurist, Vintage Car Store Inc., to L. F. Murray, 17 February 1970.
23. *Ibid.*, C. Pratte to C. J. Mackenzie, Secretary General, National Museums, 25 May 1970; on its being displayed as "Hitler's Car" see Kosche, "Story of a Car," 10.
24. CWM Artifact File 19700158-001, "Goering's Staff Car," caption, 1970–1980.
25. *Ibid.*, Collett Calverley to The Curator, Canadian War Museum, 14 September 1971.
26. *Ibid.*, Ralph Manning to Lee Murray, re *The "Goering" Car*, 17 September 1971; Murray to Manning, 19 September 1971.
27. "Hermann Goering's Mercedes Benz," *After the Battle*, no. 5 (February 1974): 52–53.
28. CWM Artifact File, 19700158-001, V. Suthren to B. Pothier, 1 November 1979.
29. *Ibid.*, *German Staff Car, 1940–1945*, caption.
30. *Ibid.*, Ralph Manning to Bernard Pothier, 11 January 1980.
31. *Ibid.*, Ralph Manning to Lee Murray, 27 November 1979.
32. *Ibid.*, see esp. facing p. 1 for photograph, and p. 3.
33. *Ibid.*, 4.
34. CWM Conservation File, Condition Rep[ort] and Treatment Proposal, 19700158-001, Daimler Benz AG, Helen Holt, no date (treatment still underway).
35. *Ibid.*, 6–7.
36. "Picasso on the Side," *Globe and Mail*, 15 April 1998.