

Frederick Mayer (spy)

From Wikipedia

Frederick "Fred" Mayer (born October 28, 1921)^[1] is a [German-born Jewish American](#) who was an OSS agent for the United States during [World War II](#). He negotiated the surrender of the [German Army](#) in [Innsbruck, Austria](#) in 1945 after he was captured in **Operation Greenup**.

Background^[edit]

Friedrich Mayer was born in [Freiburg im Breisgau](#), Baden, Germany, into a Jewish family. His father, Heinrich Mayer, had served in the [Imperial German Army](#) during [World War I](#), and was decorated with the [Iron Cross](#) Second Class for gallantry during the [Battle of Verdun](#).^[2]

After finishing high school, Friedrich Mayer worked as a diesel mechanic with the [Ford Motor Company](#). He lived by a practical motto: "Do your best at everything every day, control what you can, and what you can't, don't worry about".^[2]

After the [Nazis](#) came to power in the early 1930s, [antisemitism](#) became an official policy of the German government. Mayer's father hoped his distinguished military record would protect his family, but his wife insisted the family leave while they could. They emigrated to the [United States](#) in 1938, one year before World War II broke out in Europe. Frederick Mayer worked at twenty different jobs during his time in New York City. When one of his bosses made an antisemitic remark, Mayer knocked him down and resigned on the spot, just as he had previously done in Germany.^[3]

Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, Mayer enlisted in the [United States Army](#). During a training exercise in [Arizona](#), he crossed the "enemy" line and "captured" several officers, including a brigadier general. The general said, "You can't do that! You are breaking the rules!" Mayer replied, "War is not fair. The rules of war are to win." The general raised his hands in the air, admitting defeat.^[4]

Mayer was trained in demolition, infiltration, raiding, sniping, and hand-to-hand combat. His knowledge of several European languages made him a good candidate for the [Office of Strategic Services](#) (OSS). Mayer's group of 30 men included four other European Jewish refugees: George Gerbner (Hungary), Alfred Rosenthal (Germany), Bernd Steinitz (Germany) and Hans Wynberg (Netherlands). Each of them spoke at least two European languages, all were familiar with the European environment, and all were eager to do what they could to defeat the [Nazis](#).

Eventually, all five would serve in Austria in various OSS operations. Mayer became commander of Operation Greenup, with Wynberg serving as his radio operator.^[5]

Hans Wynberg

Hans Wynberg was born on November 28, 1922 in [Amsterdam](#), the [Netherlands](#). In 1939 Hans's father sent Wynberg and his twin brother to the United States. The boys stayed with their father's business partner and continued their education in Brooklyn Technical High School. In 1943 Wynberg joined the United States Army. At about the same time his father, mother and younger brother, who stayed in the Netherlands were captured by the [SS](#), and sent to the [Auschwitz concentration camp](#). One day Wynberg was approached by an officer, who said: "We understand you speak German, Dutch and English. Would you like to help your country?" Without hesitation Hans responded: "Sure".^[6]

Operation Greenup

Former [Director of the Central Intelligence Agency William J. Casey](#) called **Operation Greenup** "by far the most successful of OSS operations mounted from [Bari](#)". The operation included three men: Mayer, Wynberg, and Franz Weber, a former Austrian [Wehrmacht](#) officer.^[7] Their task was to scout "the heavily fortified area of Austria's '[Alpine Redoubt](#)'".^[8]

It was decided the men should be [parachuted](#) near [Innsbruck](#), but all flat areas were occupied by the military. Mayer recalled a small lake between two peaks that was frozen in February. It wasn't an easy place to fly to, especially in the winter conditions, but finally a pilot named Billings volunteered. "If they are crazy enough to jump there, I will be crazy enough to take them there." On February 26, 1945 the men jumped in the darkness. They found themselves at the ridge of a [glacier](#) at a 10,000 feet elevation. They found all but one container that was dropped with them. Unfortunately their [skis](#) were in that missing container. They had to walk down the slope in a waist-deep snow.^{[9][10]}

Eventually they reached Weber's family. With their help, Mayer posed as a German Army officer. He actually stayed in the officers' barracks in Innsbruck for several months. The information he collected was promptly radioed back by Wynberg.^{[11][12]} After three months Mayer decided to pose as a French electrician, who supposedly was fleeing from the advancing Soviet forces.^[13]

Arrest and torture

Mayer was arrested when a black market racketeer he dealt with was caught by the [Gestapo](#) and named him as a spy. As soon as his interrogation became physical, the black marketer revealed that he knew a high ranking American agent. Mayer spoke only in [French](#), and tried to convince the Gestapo he was what he pretended to be. He was [tortured](#) to force him to talk:

“ In the dark room, the Gestapo officers slapped and punched the spy in the face. His cover wasn't holding water, and so the tall one stripped him from head to toe. Despite the agent's bullish strength, the SS men brutally manhandled him, shoving him to the floor. Cuffing his hands in front of him and pulling his arms over his bent knees, they forced him into a constricting fetal position, then shoved the barrel of a long rifle into the tiny gap behind his knees and his cuffed hands. With a man on each side of the rifle, they lifted his naked, rolled-up body and suspended the human ball between two tables, like a piece of meat on a skewer. Uncoiling a rawhide whip, the tall one put his full weight behind each swing, mercilessly thrashing the agent's body like a side of beef.^{[13][14]} ”

All that time the Gestapo kept asking where his radio and radio operator were. One Nazi noticed that Mayer was circumcised, but the other dismissed it. They refused to believe that a Jew would return as an agent for the Allies.^[14]

Then the man who betrayed him was brought to face Mayer. Realizing there was no more use pretending, Mayer began speaking German. He confirmed he was an American. However, he insisted he worked alone.^{[13][15]}

German surrender



[Franz Hofer](#)

At the same time Mayer was tortured, Hermann Matull, another American agent, was being interrogated by Gestapo. He was shown the picture of Mayer's bitten and swollen face, and asked if he knew the man. Matull did not think long. He claimed that Mayer was a "big shot" in American command, and that if Mayer were shot, the Americans would kill all who had mistreated him. Matull even insisted that a man as senior as Mayer could be interrogated only by the [Gauleiter of Tyrol and Vorarlberg, Franz Hofer](#).^[16]

Hofer believed that the defeat of Germany was inevitable, and was looking for a way to surrender to Americans rather than to the [Red Army](#). He ordered the Gestapo to bring Mayer to him. Mayer was introduced to Hofer's wife and the German ambassador to [Benito Mussolini](#)'s government, Rudolph Rahn. They ate dinner and talked. Mayer initially believed it was just a new way to make him to reveal where his radio operator Hans Wynberg was located, but later understood that the Germans were really there to discuss their surrender.^[12] Rahn said he was going to [Bern](#), and promised to deliver Mayer's message to [Allen Welsh Dulles](#), the OSS man there. Mayer agreed. It was the only way to inform the center what was going on without revealing the existence of Wynberg. Dulles got the message and cabled it to OSS headquarters in Italy: "'Fred Mayer reports he is in Gestapo hands but cabled 'Don't worry about me, I'm really not bad off'" – a remarkable message considering it was coming from a Jew.^[17]

On the morning of May 3, 1945, the American [103rd Infantry Division](#) of the [Seventh Army](#) was ordered to take Innsbruck. When the troops got closer to the city, they saw an approaching car with a white banner made out of a [bed sheet](#). Major Bland West, an intelligence officer, saw a young man with a swollen face jumping out of the car. He introduced himself as Lt. Mayer of OSS, and explained he was going to take the major with him to accept the German surrender. Later on West found out that Mayer was a [sergeant](#). Thus, the German troops in this area surrendered to an American sergeant, a Jewish emigrant from [Germany](#).^[18]

Mayer was awarded the [Legion of Merit](#) and a [Purple Heart](#) by the United States Government.^[19]

Recent Events

A TV movie based on the Operation Greenup, with Frederick Mayer and the other surviving agents and family members, titled *The Real Inglorious Bastards*, was premiered on [History Television](#)^{[20][21]} In it, Wynberg and Mayer are reconnected for a discussion via webcam chat. Hans Wynberg died the day after his interview for the production.

On April 25, 2013 Senator [Jay Rockefeller](#) from West Virginia wrote a letter to President Obama asking the President to consider further recognizing Fred's heroic service to the country. ^[22]

On November 3, 2013 Fred attended a program chaired by U.S. Senator Jay Rockefeller honoring veterans Sunday afternoon at [Parkersburg High School](#). As part of Sunday's program, Rockefeller presented Mayer with a framed letter from President [Barack Obama](#) recognizing his service. Rockefeller later [tweeted](#) that he is working to secure the [Congressional Medal of Honor](#) for him. ^[23]

References

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3. [Jump up](#)[^] O'Donell 2009, pp. 5-6
4. [Jump up](#)[^] O'Donell 2009, p. 4
5. [Jump up](#)[^] O'Donell 2009, pp. 57-59
6. [Jump up](#)[^] O'Donell 2009, p. 15
7. [Jump up](#)[^] Schwab 1996, p. xi
8. [Jump up](#)[^] Moon 2000, p.
9. [Jump up](#)[^] Moon 2000, p. 308
10. [Jump up](#)[^] Schwab 1996, p. 4
11. [Jump up](#)[^] Moon 2000, p. 277
12. [^] [Jump up to:](#)^{a b} Mayer 2010
13. [^] [Jump up to:](#)^{a b c} Moon 2000, p. 273
14. [^] [Jump up to:](#)^{a b} O'Donell 2009, p. 1
15. [Jump up](#)[^] O'Donell 2009, p. 130
16. [Jump up](#)[^] O'Donell 2009, p. 132
17. [Jump up](#)[^] O'Donell 2009, p. 134
18. [Jump up](#)[^] Moon 2000, p. 276

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