



SS Colonel (Standartenführer) Hans Landa - a Nazi "Jew Hunter" who speaks four languages and takes his work seriously in occupied France - is played by Christoph Waltz. Is Hans Landa based on a real-life person?

Even if Quentin Tarantino was not influenced by historical events, a Nazi "Jew Hunter" named Alois Brunner comes to mind as a real-life "Hans Landa." Who was he?

Adolf Eichmann personally chose Brunner to implement Hitler's "Final Solution" in France. Operating on "orders directly from Berlin," the ruthless SS officer was brutally efficient.

What were his methods? In *Vichy France and the Jews*, by Michael Marrus and Robert Paxton, we learn that:

Brunner organized squads that prowled about the country [of France] making arrests. His forces included Gestapo, Feldgendarmeries, and miscellaneous French forces under German control...but never the French police...

...In the fall [of 1942], Brunner's squads...spread a "veritable panic" according to the prefect [of Savoie]. In September they were at work in the Alpes-Maritimes in "a real climate of terror." (Vichy France and the Jews, pages 330-31.)

We learn more about Brunner's methods (and what he thought of himself, as reflected in his SS application) from a Brunner-researcher, Mary Felstiner:

Brunner's SS colleagues remarked on his slight build, "hooked nose" and "kinky hair." They nicknamed him "Jew Suss," the foul protagonist of an anti-Semitic film...Brunner set out to eliminate from Europe everything he considered sub-male and counter-Aryan. (Felstiner, quoted in Reading Charlotte Salomon, ed. by Michael Steinberg and Monica Bohn-Duchen, pages 206-7.)

Where, in France, did Brunner conduct his operations?

He was a master deceiver. As commandant of Drancy, a huge transit camp outside Paris...he derived his power from disinformation. In Brunner's camp deportees guessed nothing of their fate. (Felstiner, in Reading Charlotte Salomon, pg 206.)

Although many high-ranking Nazis were captured after the war, such was not the lot of Alois Brunner:

This murderer escaped. After 1945, a secret postwar network...obscured SS men, including Brunner. He [allegedly] worked for Syria from the 1950s on ... hiding his identity ... he'd personally dispatched 130,000 Jews. "All of them deserved to die," said Brunner in Damascus to a journalist [Günther Deschner, who published his article in Bunte, a West German magazine], as late as 1987; "I have no regrets and would do it again." (Felstiner, in Reading Charlotte Salomon, pg 207.)

Brunner was never captured. An American documentary, from 2003, sheds some light on his criminal activities:

In March 2003, an American documentary film entitled Alois Brunner: The Last Nazi was released, reflecting widespread interest in the fate of a key war criminal who was never caught. His crimes had been brought before courts [including in France, during 2001, where he was convicted in absentia], but he had never personally appeared there. His entire postwar career was shrouded by fog and deception.

Born in 1912 in the Austrian Burgenland, Brunner joined the Nazi Party illegally in 1931 and joined the SS on October 10, 1939. From 1939 he served as Eichmann's secretary ... whose task it was to force Jews from the Reich. In this capacity he organized forced deportations of 47,000 Austrian Jews to ghettos and death camps.

Transferred to Salonika in March 1943, Brunner oversaw the deportation of 43,000 Jews from Greece in two months.

In June 1943 he took over the Drancy camp, the assembly point for Jews to be deported from France. In fourteen months he sent roughly 24,000 Jews to the East.

He also directed a special commando unit to arrest Jews in Nice and bring them to Drancy, and he paid French collaborators for each Jew arrested.

As late as July 1944, he organized a sweep for hidden Jewish children in France, which located and deported 250 minors as well as the last Jewish convoy from Paris on August 17, 1944.

Where did he spend his time after the war?

*The best evidence suggested that Brunner was in Damascus. He was said to have suffered disfiguring wounds from a package bomb attack in September 1961, possibly sent by an Israeli intelligence agent. (Above series of quotes from *U.S. intelligence and the Nazis*, by Richard Breitman, excerpts from [pages 159 - 162](#).)*

In *Sword of the Golem*, a novel by Jeff Minde and Ken Tucker, Alois Brunner (using his alias Georg Fischer, as he allegedly had, in real life, during [his sojourn in Syria](#)) meets a young woman named Shoshona:

"Let us not waste time on irrelevancies," Brunner waved her off. "I must introduce myself. I am Herr Georg Fischer."

"You are Alois Brunner," Shoshona said flatly.

*Brunner looked surprised for a moment... (*Sword of the Golem*, [pages 80-81](#).)*

As it happens, therefore, we have compelling evidence for a real Hans Landa, the SS "Jew Hunter" of "[Inglourious Basterds](#)." (This link takes you to the film's screenplay.)

Credits:

Image online, via Wikimedia Commons.

A word about the whereabouts of Alois Brunner ... no government has yet been able to locate him (or to learn whether he is dead or alive). However ... in December of 2014, a Nazi hunter announced that evidence suggests Brunner died in Syria during 2010.

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Media Stream



Alois Brunner - "Jew Hunter" in France

Image online, courtesy the Ministry of the Interior, Austrian government.

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