

Peter Pirker, *Codename Brooklyn: Jüdische Agenten im Feindesland. Die Operation Greenup 1945. Mit einem Fotoessay von Markus Jenewein (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 2019)*

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Of all the many genres of World War II historiography, perhaps the most problematic is that of espionage. Books dealing with spies, double agents, and breathless derring-do almost always include exaggerated claims that an intrepid hero or heroes played a key role in bringing down the Third Reich. While unscholarly, such books are extremely popular, and it is certain that we haven't seen the last World War II spy thriller.

For all these reasons, historians should welcome Peter Pirker's *Codename Brooklyn*. Pirker tells a tale that is even more improbable than the potboilers discussed above: two Jewish refugees to the United States living in Brooklyn (Frederick Mayer, twenty-three, and Hans Wijnberg, twenty-two) enlist in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and parachute into Austria in 1945 to report on German rail traffic over the Brenner Pass. Their little band also consisted of a third member, Franz Weber, a lieutenant in the *Wehrmacht* who has come to his senses about the murderous nature of the Nazis' war. Service on a half-dozen fronts, including the vicious partisan struggle in occupied Yugoslavia, has made Weber see the reality of Hitler's dystopian plan to transform the continent into "KZ-Europa." Weber deserts to the Allies, makes contact with the OSS, and agrees to work with Mayer and Wijnberg. Think of them as the real "inglorious basterds," and indeed, Mayer himself is alleged to have said that the three of them "wanted to kill Nazis."

While they didn't embark on a killing spree, they did succeed in their mission. Operation Greenup, as it was called, yielded the Allies real material benefits, transmitting over sixty radio messages with detailed accounts of Brenner traffic to the OSS listening station in Bari, located in the Italian heel. Data gleaned from these reports helped US intelligence officers explode the myth that the Germans were concentrating men and weapons in the south for a last-ditch defense of an "Alpine redoubt." Despite being captured and nearly tortured to death, Mayer was able to make contact with enough local officials, including Tyrolean Gauleiter Franz Hofer, to negotiate the peaceful surrender of Innsbruck to the US Seventh Army. Compared to dozens of other cities and towns, defended till the last ditch

by the German forces and then pulverized by US air power and artillery, Innsbruck survived nearly unscathed. We can say with some assurance, therefore, that Greenup saved many thousands of lives, Austrian and American alike.

While the operation has not gone completely unnoticed (it is discussed in Joseph Persico's 1979 book, *Piercing the Reich*, for instance), Pirker notes in this meticulous and masterfully researched reconstruction that it has had very little resonance in Austria itself. Postwar Austria, after all, was home to thousands of individuals deeply implicated in the crimes of the Nazi state. Calling attention to Greenup would only serve to call attention to all those Nazi officials who had hunted down Mayer and his friends, tortured them, and staged a horrible late-war *razzia* of denunciations, arrests, and extrajudicial murders. Moreover, endorsement of Greenup meant, by definition, condemnation of one's own fathers, brothers, and sons who were fighting and dying to defend the Nazi regime that Greenup was trying to destroy.

When it came to memories of the Third Reich, postwar Austria preferred to see itself as Hitler's first victim, a virtuous little republic swallowed up in the Anschluss and then forced to take part in the war. Austrians enjoyed reading the published accounts of Fritz Molden, who described the heroic exploits of his homegrown resistance group, O5, or watching the 1980s television documentary *Österreich II* by Hugo Portisch, accounts which Pirker exposes as almost completely fictional.

As this fine book reminds us, Germany, Austria, and the Tyrol itself were liberated not by homegrown resistance but by Allied military power, an unlikely alliance that included not only the armed might of the US Army but also officially marginalized figures within the Nazi state: Jews like Mayer and Wijnberg, bent on injuring the regime that had persecuted them and, in Wijnberg's case, killed his parents; Weber, a military deserter currently on the run from a death sentence; Anna Niederkircher, keeper of the *Zur Krone* inn, who gave the team shelter, support, and protection from the authorities and who once said, "If Hitler wins the war, then I don't believe in God anymore"; and not least, a handful of trained OSS operatives in the United States and in Bari. Indeed, the real service of Pirker's book is the way it nests its heroic narrative within these various contexts of Jewish resistance, internal dissent, and transnational networks.

Pirker also emphasizes the "transitory milieu" that generated and sustained this act of resistance—a temporary mixture of Allied war aims, personal motives, and war weariness. Surprisingly, Tyrolean particularism didn't seem to play a particularly important role, although Pirker does identify regional Catholicism as an ingredient, generating "in many individuals

a distinct reticence towards the totalitarian claims of the NS Regime and its *Führer* who had supposedly been chosen by Providence” (308-09). But like all transitory moments, this one passed only to be replaced in the post-war world by the imperatives of anti-communism and the Cold War, and Greenup disappeared from Austrian memory.

Code-Name Brooklyn is a tour de force that belongs in any collection of literature on wartime resistance. With lavish assistance from Markus Jenewein’s accompanying photo essay, Pirker succeeds in restoring Greenup to its rightful place in World War II memory and proves once again that even Quentin Tarantino’s wildest fantasy has nothing on real life.