So Wise, So Young
Gareth Jones, Journalist

Gareth Huw Davies
CONTENTS

Introduction
Report
Afterword
Introduction

Gareth Jones was a prolific and adventurous journalist who was murdered one day short of his 30th birthday by bandits in China. His brief career, in which he filed more international scoops than most of his contemporaries would deliver in a lifetime, followed a path not so far from that of his fictional namesake Indiana Jones, with an additional touch of Zelig, a fictional character who had the knack of turning up in important places – until he found himself in the wrong, last place.

Outside his native Wales, the superficially unremarkable, non-conformist linguist with pebble spectacles, a perfectly buttoned-up overcoat and trilby - in an age when foreign correspondents were self publicist, drink sodden bar-flies - was soon forgotten. (Intriguingly, however, George Orwell may have given him an unlikely enduring celebrity by taking his name for the character Mr Jones in Animal Farm.)

Jones’s ultimate misfortune may have been to stray too deeply into the murky world of international power politics. He lost his life in 1935, when the world, sliding towards another great conflict, had no time to spare for solitary victims such as Jones, the small, brave people on the edge of the action.

The writer’s last big assignment was to try to make sense of the murky political picture in the Far East, dominated by the tension between China and Japan, with Russia pulling the strings in the background.

He had earlier walked around remote spots in the Ukraine exposing the horror of a state-sponsored famine which was killing millions. He travelled with Hitler in his private plane during his election campaign in 1933. He wrote perceptive pieces on Franklin Delano Roosevelt in the early days of his presidency. He penned agreeable essays on the declining rural traditions of his native Wales.

This is my account of one of his scoops.

****
February 23rd, 1933, on a snowy runway at Tempelhof Airport in Berlin. A young Welsh reporter is in place for the first of a series of remarkable scoops. His articles will be read around the world and will illuminate the last two years of his short life, before he becomes, according to some, the first casualty of the coming Second World War.

The man, the trim, sharply intelligent and journalistically mature beyond his years Gareth Jones, stands alongside the Richthofen, the fastest passenger aeroplane in Germany, capable of the then astonishing speed of 150 miles an hour. He is waiting for Adolf Hitler to arrive.

The leader is just three weeks into his destiny job as Chancellor of Germany. He is about to make a quick dash to Frankfurt, part of a whirlwind electioneering programme that will hurtle him like a human shuttlecock around Germany in his bid to win total power through democracy. Among the assembled Nazi party aids awaiting his arrival is Hitler's image maker, the indifferent novelist with a Ph.D. in 18th-century romantic drama, Joseph Goebbels.

Goebbels, notes Jones, is picnicking on a cheese sandwich and reading his own Nazi party newspaper, the Angriff (the title means attack). The headline says: "50,000 hear Dr Goebbels in Hanover".

The Rhinelander intrigues him. In his article that appears a few days later he describes him as "a little man with remarkably lively brown eyes which twinkle with wit and intelligence, and a great sense of humour. He has a narrow Iberian head, like a South Wales collier -- the dark, small, sharp Welsh type so often found in the Glamorgan valleys." Jones finds him "sympathetic, friendly, slightly incongruous.

"Goebbels is the brain of the National-Socialist Party and, after Hitler, its most emotional speaker." Jones writes with chilling foresight: "His is a name to remember; he will play a big part in the future. He is to be one of the great figures in Germany."

Indeed he will. This is the man who will perfect the "Big Lie", the propaganda technique based on the theory that untruth, if audacious enough and repeated often enough, will be believed by the masses.

Standing next to Goebbels is his "pretty" wife, the blonde Magda Goebbels. This is the mother who 12 years later, hours after the death of Hitler, would poison her six children, following a prearranged plan.

Jones writes: "Somebody gave a cry: 'The Leader is coming.' A car drives through the snow. Out steps a very ordinary looking man...a slight figure in a shapeless black hat, wearing an ordinary greyish brown mackintosh. He looks like a middle-class grocer. His hair is fairly dark and brushed. Hitler surprised me by his smile. He was more natural and less of a poseur than I had expected."
“When he raised his arm flabbily to greet those who had assembled to see him, I was mystified. How had this ordinary-looking man succeeded in becoming deified by fourteen million people?”

Jones is introduced. “His handshake was firm, but his large, outstanding eyes seemed emotionless as he greeted me.” He notes that Hitler is not closely protected. “The Bodyguard just chats around; one gives his photo as a boxer to [Jones's colleague] Delmer.”

In a later age of cleverly crafted media moments, what happened next would have been expertly choreographed and carefully rehearsed as a photo opportunity. But here it seems to have been entirely spontaneous.

Jones reports on the laddish diversion: “Hitler sees Goebbels' new brown motor-car and immediately displayed a great interest in it. He gets inside. He wants to learn all about it. A few minutes later, with Hitler inside, the car is driving through the snow, hooting. Hitler comes out – there was something boyish about him.”

Jones is one of only two outsider, non-German observers present that day. The other is Sefton Delmer of the Daily Express. Together they are the first journalists to accompany Hitler in his new aeroplane since he became Chancellor. Was Jones chosen because the Nazis thought he might be intoxicated by the charisma of the emerging tyrant, as many journalists would show themselves to be over the coming years?

Some simple research by Nazi intelligence would have shown that Jones was no tame sycophant. He had recently written the following in the Western Mail, the national newspaper of his native Wales: “The personality of Hitler arouses no confidence in the calm observer. It is hard to reconcile his shrieking hatred of the Jews with any balanced judgment. It is hard to think that a telegram he sent congratulating certain Nazis who had brutally murdered a Communist before the eyes of the murdered man’s family reveals any spirit of justice. Hitler’s neurotic behaviour in a December meeting of Nazis, when he burst into tears and wept without control, was not that of a Bismark.”

The most likely explanation is that the Nazis haven't seen the article, or wouldn't have cared if they had. The least likely interpretation is that they admired the young man’s candour and honesty, and believed this might help promote their leader to the wider world.

But there is a third possibility, and the one that I incline towards. The man who put Jones on the plane, Ernst Hanfstaeng, was, remarkably enough, a Harvard graduate with strong roots in the USA. His grandfather had attended Lincoln. He had met Jones the previous year, and must surely have recognized a soulmate in the intelligent and able young Welshman. Perhaps he saw in Jones somebody who might appreciate the wider significance of the Nazi project.
Whatever Hitler’s image makers were looking for, what the world was able to read within a few days was one of the earliest eyewitness accounts of a monster of depravity setting off to work.

They board Hitler’s smart new plane. The call sign D-2202 was picked out in black and grey on the Junkers’ wing, denoting its prime position in Hitler’s Squadron. He is the first political leader in the world to harness the power of the aeroplane in election campaigning. He shall not need fast planes to win votes again.

Airborne, Jones jotted in his notebook the following momentous line: “If this plane were to crash, the history of the world would be different.” It became the opening line in his account of this flight, which appeared a few days later in the *Western Mail*. It deserves to be counted as one of the great “I was there” articles in journalism.

“A few feet away [from me] sits Adolf Hitler, Chancellor of Germany and leader of the most volcanic nationalist awakening which the world has seen. Six thousand feet beneath us, hidden by a sea of rolling white clouds, is the land which he has roused to a frenzy.”

However, for a few brief hours, as the *Fuehrermaschine* droned with steady efficiency over the River Elbe at 132 mph, the awful march of 1930s’ history was briefly suspended. Jones’s notes show that the mood was relaxed, jocular, and even playful. As a relative newcomer to flying, he remarks with simple wonder on the clouds beneath him - “beautiful, with a remarkable formation of fleecy waves.”

Jones was setting up the first of many big stories he was to write in 1933. Even in those days, with far fewer journalists, much less competition for stories, and more opportunities to dig out big news from less protective sources, few newspaper writers would enjoy such an *annus mirabilis*. First came his prescient reporting in Germany. Within weeks he was to uncover a human catastrophe in Russia, which ranks among the most heinous crimes of the 20th century. Later in the year he met the main players in troubled Ireland, including the new Irish leader Eamonn de Valera.

Gareth Jones was already a well-established investigative journalist. He was generally pictured in an ample overcoat and a trilby, a mild-mannered man behind thick round Harry Potter-esque glasses. To describe him as a temperate version of Indiana Jones is not so wide of the mark. This Jones, too, was on an urgent quest - for information. He had the style, if not the look, of the adventurer. When he made his final journey into the Gobi desert, he was following roughly in the footsteps of the James Bond author Ian Fleming.

Jones had worked as a personal secretary to David Lloyd George before taking up work as a freelance journalist. He may not have shared the facility with words of his more famous, and similarly short-lived countryman Dylan Thomas, who was recognized in his own lifetime as one of the greatest poets in the English language. Reportage was not then, quite so much as it today, about eloquent, elegant picture painting. Yet just as Dylan Thomas worked, with relentless application at every word, so did Jones diligently set up interview after interview to prise out that essential kernel of truth.
In the days before strictly ordered press accreditation, and with a lot less competition, Jones managed to meet many important figures of the day. He conformed to the model of the foreign correspondent who travelled fast and light with a battered contacts book, only up to a point. Jones was teetotal, a departure from the common stereotype of the drink-sodden barfly. He sent long, dutiful letters home to his family, full of tender familiarity, and the constant craving for Auntie Betty’s cake.

That same year, at the age of 27, he would do enough to win himself a place of honour as an international journalist with his expose of the dreadful hunger in the Ukraine. Unfortunately he was to run up against New York Times correspondent Walter Duranty, a quirky Briton with a vivid pen, who had won a Pulitzer Prize the year before.

There were to be no awards in his lifetime for Jones. History washed over countless brief lives in that decade, and removed all trace of many of them. But my own father remembered Gareth Jones, and gave me the name of this intrepid seeker after truth. From my early childhood one piece of qualifying information had lodged in my mind – “Welshman killed by bandits in China.”

If Jones had been able to extend his career, placing himself with uncanny ease at the very heart of great events as a tempestuous decade unfolded, and in easy conversation with powerful people, he would surely have gone on to become one of the great journalists of his era.

All the main players on that flight from Berlin that snowy day, although we can’t speak for the anonymous bodyguards, went on to survive to at least the last days of the Second World War. A number made it into quite successful old age. But not Gareth Jones. Within 30 months the brilliant linguist and aid to former Liberal Prime Minister David Lloyd George would become, some would argue, the first casualty of the coming world war, which he already feared the man sitting within touching distance of him would unleash.

As it was, this is a routine flight for Hitler, and one of the safer assignments Jones would fulfill in his short life. Air safety would play no part in Hitler’s downfall. Aerial terrorism was one outrage not to be developed in the coming age of carnage.

Besides, he is flying in the pride of the German air industry, although, ironically, the engines were by American company Pratt & Whitney, made under licence by BMW. The plane is piloted by Hitler’s newly appointed personal pilot, the pick of the German aviators, Captain Bauer, the “plump, laughing man” to whom Jones has been introduced a little earlier, at the aerodrome.

****

Jones is seated three rows from the front on the left-hand side, amongst the bodyguards dressed in their black and silver uniforms, decorated with red swastika badges. From here the Welshman is perfectly positioned to view the principal players in the Nazi party’s audacious power smash and grab.
He studies Hitler, across the aisle and one seat in front. The leader begins with workmanlike intent, perusing a map and then reading some papers in a blue folder. After a while he switches to reading the Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung. After admiring the photo of two girls on the front page, he picks up Ullstein Bild magazine – a German satirical magazine of the 1930s. He reads the joke pages and laughs. He shows the paper to Goebbels; Goebbels laughs.

A little later the human dynamo takes a rest. “He has his head on his hand. He looks as if he is sleeping.” Jones is already revising his opinion of the leader, which he had formed when they met earlier. "He does not look impressive," notes Jones.

He turns his attention to Josef Goebbels, sitting just behind Hitler. “Goebbels wants a haircut,” he writes in his notebook. Goebbels did not yet hold office. When Hitler became Chancellor three weeks earlier, the coalition cabinet that he headed contained only a minority of Nazis as part of the deal he negotiated with President von Hindenburg and the conservative parties.

However as the propaganda head of the ruling party, a party that had little respect for the law, he immediately began to behave as though he were in power. He began by commandeering the state radio for a live broadcast of the torchlight parade that celebrated Hitler's assumption of office.

Three weeks later, on 13 March 1933, Goebbels will be rewarded for his part in bringing the Nazis to power, when he is appointed Reich Minister of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda. His new ministry will have palatial accommodation in the 18th-century Leopold Palace on Wilhelmstrasse, just across from Hitler's offices in the Reich Chancellery. There he will centralize Nazi control of all aspects of German cultural and intellectual life, the press, radio and the visual and performing arts.

The two men are travelling with an intriguing supporting cast. Jones helpfully sets down the flight manifest in his notebook. At the controls of the Fuehrermaschine is the 36 year old Capt. Hans Bauer, a war hero and pioneer civil aviator, who leads the newly established special air squadron, the Fliegerstaffel des Fuehrers. He would eventually die at the age of 96, albeit with only one leg. He was to lose the other when the Russians shot him after he failed to take off on a pockmarked runway close to Hitler's bunker in 1945.

Bauer was one of the most experienced aviators in Germany. After distinguished service as a pilot in the First World War, he went on to become the first million kilometer fight pilot in civil aviation, in the 1920s. In May 1928 he piloted the inaugural Lufthansa flight from Munich to Rome. One of his passengers that day was the famously frenetic conductor Arturo Toscanini.

Over the coming years Bauer would fly Hitler, his inner circle, and visiting dignitaries throughout Europe, to Hitler's secret headquarters and to the far-flung battlefields of the Eastern Front. He would go on to pilot his leader safely through to the last days of the war, and even then he believed he might have carried the defeated Hitler to safety in Japan, in a daring escape which would involve refueling from a U-boat in the Atlantic.
His autobiography *Ich flog mit den Mächtigen der Erde*, roughly translated as "I flew with the mighty of the Earth." The French translation was more modest: "J’étais pilote de Hitler; le sort du monde était entre mes mains" which translates as "I was Hitler's pilot; the fate of the world was in my hands."

On Hitler's left is a “massive, fair-haired man besides whom Hitler looks dwarf-like.” This is Hitler's adjutant, 49 year old Wilhelm Brückner. He will outlive his master by nine years and – like most of Hitler's team – will write his autobiography. In November 1923 Brückner took part in the Beer Hall Putsch in Munich. He was sentenced to a year and a half in prison. He worked in a variety of jobs, including sales representative, before becoming Hitler's adjutant and bodyguard, later rising to chief adjutant, one of Hitler's closest confidants.

Brückner, unusual among those in Hitler's innermost circle, was well liked by callers at the Reich Chancellery who found him straightforward and affable. He lost ground with his master at the start of the war, was fired after an argument, and joined the *Wehrmacht*, where he became a colonel.

In the seat in front of Jones was the burly 17 stone, 28-year-old Sefton Delmer, Berlin correspondent of the *Daily Express*. He would go on to compose some of the most risqué propaganda in the coming war. Returning to England in 1940, he was recruited to organize 'Black Propaganda' broadcasts to Nazi Germany. Delmer's work included spreading rumours that foreign workers were sleeping with the wives of German soldiers serving overseas. When government minister Stafford Cripps found out, he wrote: "If this is the sort of thing that is needed to win the war, why, I'd rather lose it."

Even Delmar had Germanic connections - he was born in Berlin to an Austrian father - which made Jones the only genuine outsider in this company, unless we count one very interesting aide. He man sits at front of the plane, next to the bulkhead which shows a clock and an airspeed indicator, and a little table at which the Führer could work, on which was a small Nazi flag. This is the man with a foot on two continents.

Ernst Hanfstaengl, the Nazis' liaison officer with the US and British press, is the man responsible for putting Jones and Delmer on the flight. At 6'4" he is an imposing figure. One writer referred to his eyebrows as two great black beetles. This remarkable man was Hitler's confidant and bestower of musical balm. Many a time, late in the evening, he would calm the frazzled dictator by playing the piano to him.

Hitler and Hanfstaengl (Putzi ) were inseparable, dashing hither and thither about the Fatherland in the Reich Chancellor's private plane. "What Hitler was able to do to a crowd in two hours will never be repeated in 10,000 years," Hanfstaengl said. "Because of his miraculous throat construction, he was able to create a rhapsody of hysteria." Within seven years he would be confiding to President Roosevelt all he knew about Hitler and his top team.

The only Harvard graduate to work in Hitler's inner circle, one writer described him rather unnecessarily, as if there were so many others from the Boston University in line for a job. Hanfstaengl was born in America. His mother came from Cornwall.
Hollow, Connecticut. Her father, German emigrant William Heine, became a general in the Union Army and attended at Lincoln's funeral.

This is how Putzi came to the service of Hitler. A fellow member of the Harvard Hasty Pudding club, who had become a U.S. Embassy official, asked Hanfstaengl to assist a military attaché sent to report on Munich’s political scene in 1922. He was asked to attend a Nazi rally and say what he thought of the rising Hitler. Hanfstaengl was so impressed with the firebrand politician that he became one of his most loyal followers.

Hanfstaengl left Hitler’s service in 1937, after a cruel practical joke made it clear to him that his life was in danger. He was sent by plane with orders to bail out behind Republican lines in Spain. His increasing agitation turned into panic when the plane made an emergency landing. Only then did he find out that the plane had merely been circling over Germany. Convinced that the Nazi "wild men" were about to kill him, he fled to Switzerland and then made his way to Britain, where he was interned. He was then shipped on to America, and became an adviser to President Roosevelt.

He would later explain, in his autobiography, that the musical tradition at American college football may have influenced the thunderous Nazi chant. Sitting at the piano he demonstrated to Hitler the buoyant, hypnotic beat of American brass bands and cheerleaders. He told an interviewer: "I had Hitler fairly shouting with enthusiasm. 'That's it, Hanfstaengl, that is what we need for the movement, marvellous,' and he pranced up and down the room like a drum majorette." The "Rah, rah, rah!" refrain of Harvardsmen became the deafening "Sieg Heil! Sieg Heil!" of the Brownshirt. Hanfstaengl conceded that, as Hitler's "American expert", I suppose I must take my share of the blame."

I suspect that Hanfstaengl saw his intellectual equal in Jones. Here was someone he could work with. Hanfstaengl had asked Jones to fly with Hitler the previous summer. Jones was unable to make the date. There may have been another reason Jones was favoured. Germans directed most of their post-First World War venom against the French and Belgians. The British were seen as honourable foes and fighters, and were afforded more respect.

Jones turns his attention to bodyguards who sit alongside him, proud in their black and silver uniforms with red swastika badges. One “scarred, well-built” specimen is ragging a sleeping colleague, covering him with newspapers. So far the bodyguards have offered Jones two boiled eggs, two bags of chocolate, an apple and biscuits. Jones notes there is nothing “hard and Prussian” about these men and the other passengers. They could not be more friendly and polite, even if he were “a red-hot Nazi” himself.

“The chief of the bodyguard is now drinking to my health in soda-water and grinning.” He shows Jones the silver badge that he wears on his breast, indicating that he has been a follower of Hitler for thirteen years. He is proud of his uniform and points out his photograph in a weekly illustrated newspaper.

Hitler is asleep. Jones looks out of the window. “The clouds underneath have now cleared, and we can see the Elbe winding below. The sun is shining upon the engine
He picks up the Nazi party newspaper. A notice in the “In Memoriam” section throws light on the wave of emotion currently crashing over Germany.

“Beneath the photograph, surrounded by a thick black line, of a handsome young boy in a Nazi uniform I read: ‘The father of this Storm Trooper, Gerhard Schlemminger, was one of the two million who fell for Germany [in the First World War]. The wife he left behind bravely went along her path of duty and educated her son to be a sincere, honourable German citizen in the decadent post-war days of confusion and vice. But Gerhard, who gave all his energy for the freeing of Germany, was yesterday struck dead by a murderous Bolshevik bullet.’”

Jones writes that Hitler and his followers feel that the hundreds of Nazis, such as this young boy, who have died in street battles must be avenged, and they will be ruthless in crushing Communist opposition.

Goebbels is still wide awake. “I look at the vivacious little man and see that he is reading Wilson’s Fourteen Points [the basis of the Treaty of Versailles and the cause of so much German bitterness]. His smile has disappeared, and his chin is determined. He looks as if he were burning to avenge what the Nazis call the betrayal of 1918. I recall the Nazi slogan: ‘Retribution.’ ”

The plane will be landing shortly. "Hitler is now turning and smiling to his adjutant. He looks mild. Can this be the ruthless enemy of Bolshevism? It puzzles me." But the man of the moment is undergoing a metamorphosis.

“Frankfurt is beneath us. A crowd is gathered below. Thousands of faces look up. We make a smooth landing. Nazi leaders, some in brown, some in black and silver, all with a red swastika armband, await their chief. Hitler steps out of the aeroplane. But he is now a man spiritually transformed. His eyes have a certain fixed purpose. Here is a different Hitler.”

By the rapid repetition of his name, Jones may be consciously, or unconsciously, imitating the leader’s potent, repetitive style. “There are two Hitlers - the natural boyish Hitler, and the Hitler who is inspired by tremendous national force, a great Hitler. It is the second Hitler who has stirred Germany to an awakening.”

Jones had been a seasoned traveller since his school days. He was a prolific linguist, and a keen student of Germany for the past 10 years. He first visited the country in 1922, when the German Mark was already worthless. He witnessed the temporary recovery of German finances in the late 1920s, and the economy’s subsequent plunge back into the mire at the start of the Great Depression in the early 1930s, when there were 6 million unemployed.

He saw and understood the failure of German democracy: he heard, in so many conversations, why Germans felt so bitter about the Treaty of Versailles and loss of territory.

In 1930 and 1931 Jones worked for fiery Welshman David Lloyd George, the former Liberal Prime Minister. Before that he worked briefly for The Times, and contributed
to other international publications, including the *Manchester Guardian* and various German newspapers.

Since the summer of 1932 Jones had been touring Germany and other European countries gathering information for Lloyd George, and reporting his observations and meetings for newspapers. The previous autumn he had reported the changing mood in various German cities.

In a corridor on a train steaming out of Bremen station towards Hanover and Leipzig he chatted with two German First World War veterans. One he described as “pale and excitable”. The other, a former sergeant major, was “tall, with a red, scarred face.”

The pale soldier announced that Germany “could no longer suffer the disgrace it had felt since the Socialists stabbed Germany in the back in 1918.” The red-faced veteran warned ominously that his country would reassert itself.

Jones continued the conversation in his compartment. One vehement German lady grumbled that the nation’s downtrodden state even affected horse breeding. Because Germany no longer had a standing army – a condition of the Treaty of Versailles – the previously reliable flow of young men out of the Army who knew about horses had dried up. Horse breeders such as she were the losers. Hanover horses, she explained, needed careful treatment. But they were being spoilt because young men had not been in the army, and knew nothing about horses. Here was another reason to rearm.

A few months later Jones found himself in Leipzig, the city where one of Germany’s greatest cultural heroes, Goethe, went to university, at the time when the political tectonic plates were being prised apart, as the Nazi party entered the last stage of its push to power.

Jones was in his room when the innkeeper burst in. “Hitler has been elected Chancellor” he announced triumphantly. Jones notes that even the Alsatian wolfhound in the corner barked with excitement.

The man was delighted. It was to be a coalition between the Nazis and the German Nationalist party. It would, he said, be like Britain, which had elected in national government under Ramsay MacDonald a year earlier.

Out on the streets, things stayed calm. Jones tried to buy a Communist party newspaper, and was told by the sales girl that the publication was now banned. People stood around discussing the news. Somebody described Hitler as a second Napoleon. (The person evidently did not know his history: Napoleon was defeated in a big battle quite close to the city.)

Somebody said there would be killings in the street in Berlin that night. Another bystander called Hitler's elevation an attack on the working classes. Jones had a leaflet calling for a general strike against the fascist terror thrust into his hands.
In the best traditions of the foreign correspondent, Jones maintained a professional detachment as he reported these powerful political events. There was nothing particularly acerbic in Jones’s journalistic style. (His articles show the endearing trait of drawing momentous events closer to his readership. In one he asks: “What will this mean to the peace of Europe, and of Wales?”)

Joseph Goebbels, who so far has little blood on its hands, evidently intrigued Jones. Not for him the pomposity--pricking style of the American *Time* magazine, which was soon to picture Hitler in the manner of Chaplin in the Great Dictator on its cover. The anonymous *Time* correspondent wrote in 1933: “Adolf Hitler in repose can look as flaccid as a circus fat lady, but so far as the German people know he never rests from his heroic labors, dashes constantly up and down the Fatherland in multi-motored planes, never smokes and subsists wholly on fruit, vegetables, nuts, and dairy products.”

This is how *Time* described Hitler on the day he met the president just three weeks before the flight Jones was on. “Except for beer, which few Germans consider alcoholic, Adolf Hitler touches no alcoholic tipple. Neither does he smoke. Hot water he calls ‘effeminate.’ Last week, on the biggest morning of his life, this pudgy, stoop-shouldered, tooth-brush-mustached but magnetic little man bounded out of bed after four hours sleep, soaped his soft flesh with cold water, shaved with cold water, put on his always neat but never smart clothes and braced himself for the third of his historic encounters with Paul von Beneckendorf und von Hindenburg, *Der Reickspräsident.*”

It was the same with Goebbels. *Time* referred repeatedly to his club foot, considered a degenerative ailment by the very zealots he had personally unleashed. But when Jones had dinner with the soon-to-be propaganda minister, in Frankfurt, after his flight in Hitler’s plane, his picture painting is more charitable. Or perhaps it is plain Welsh politeness. For him the clubfoot is merely a limp.

It is unfortunate, though understandable, because he didn’t train as a journalist, that Jones didn’t have shorthand. His notes of this momentous meeting are brief. (On the other hand, we can read exactly what he wrote, either at the time or shortly afterwards, on the Internet. And there is high drama in a single line of observation, in words he wrote there and then.)

Germany had made the mistake of concentrating on the sea, Goebbels told Jones. From now on its might would be on land. The idea of international corporation had been tried, and found wanting. From now on the Nazis were in control.

In those early campaigning days, his dining companion was putting together one of the most effective propaganda machines ever deployed in a democracy, which Germany still was. “The Germans have become the best propagandists in the world,” he told Jones. “You watch: next week, we’ll flood Berlin with propaganda.” Jones drove to the station with Goebbels, who left him with the chilling assurance that the Nazis would cling on to power. Nothing would dislodge them.
He expresses an understandable ambivalence about this emerging monster. On the one hand he “feels at home with Goebbels.” He recognizes a remarkably appealing personality. “He has a sense of humour and a keen brain.

Yet he spots an incongruity. "It is strange to think that this little man who looks so Iberian, is a leader of the Nazi movement, which has as its basic the supremacy of the big, blonde Nordic race. He wants to redraw public opinion on national socialist lines. Within a month, as the new Minister of Propaganda, Goebbels would play on the entire German press, stage, screen and radio (to use his own expression) as upon a vast keyboard."

Shortly before he hears Hitler speak in Frankfurt, Jones meets Kirschstein, an SS man with a skull and crossbones on his helmet. This “tall, well-built young man, with a row of white teeth, like a smart bus driver” explains Germany’s grotesque new culture of political violence. The Welsh reporter found the powerfully built young man’s smile so disarming that he had to remind himself he was talking to a murderer.

Kirschstein tells his story eagerly. He had been at a meeting when some communists burst in, determined to disrupt affairs. It was, said the German, “a rare fight.” One of the communists approached the SS man. “I just took him up and crashed his skull against the piano. His skull was broken immediately. He was done for.” Nine communists were wounded in that fight. The German was stabbed in his hand, escaped and was later captured and imprisoned. He was given an amnesty on his birthday.

Now Jones has a rally, one of the party’s great theatrical events, to attend. From his hotel window he sees Hitler’s supporting cast of thousands. "The cream of his followers are here now in this hotel, preparing for the vast meeting which is to stir the population of Frankfurt."

Jones, as a favoured western journalist, was one of the few non-German observers that day. “Hitler is now coming down the staircase [at the hotel] in his brown uniform. We must go. Before long I am destined to witness one of the most overwhelming outbursts of national emotion which history records, and the beginning of German Fascism."

For eight hours the biggest hall in Germany has been packed with 25,000 people for whom Hitler is the saviour of his nation. "They are waiting, tense with national fervour."

Ernst Hanfstaengl had fixed Jones a seat in the motorcade. “Five cars speed towards the hall. In the first sits Hitler; in the next two open cars are the stalwart bemedalled bodyguards; then comes our car with Hitler’s secretary. The hall is surrounded by Brown Shirts. Wherever we go the shout resounds, Heil, Hitler! and hundreds of outstretched hands greet us. We dash up the steps after Hitler and enter the ante-chamber.

“From within we hear roar upon roar of applause, and the thumping and the blare of a military band and the thud of marching feet. The door leading to the platform opens and two of us step on to the platform. I have never seen such a mass of people;
such a display of flags, up to the top of the high roof; such deafening roars. It is primitive, mass worship."

Nazi troops are marching with banners down broad gangways, “and as each new banner comes, there is another round of shouting. Steel helmets now march in with the old Imperial and regimental flags, symbolic of the rebirth of militarism.

“Then Hitler comes. Pandemonium! Twenty-five thousand people jump to their feet. Twenty-five thousand hands are outstretched. The ‘Heil, Hitler’ shout is overwhelming. The people are drunk with nationalism. It is hysteria. Hitler steps forward. Two adjutants take off his Brown coat. There is a hush.”

Jones describes how Hitler begins in a calm, deep voice, which gets louder and louder, higher and higher. He loses his calm and trembles in his excitement. As he begins to speak his arms are folded and he seems hunched up, but as he begins to be carried away, he stretches out his arms and he seems to grow in stature.

He attacks the rulers of Germany in the past fourteen years. Tremendous applause. He accuses them of corruption. Another huge roar. He berates the Socialists for degrading German culture. “When he shouts, ‘The future belongs to the young Germany which has arisen,’ the 25,000 leap to their feet, stretch out their right hands and roar: Heil, Hitler!”

Jones falls back on a comparison his *Western Mail* readers in Wales will instantly recognize. "Imagine a speech of Mr. Lloyd George. Take away the wit, take away the intellectual play, the gift of colour, the literary and Biblical allusions of the Welsh statesman. Add a louder voice, less varied in tone, a more unbroken stretch of emotional appeal, more demagogy, and you have Hitler. Hitler has less light and shade than Mr. Lloyd George. He has less variety of gesture. Hitler’s main motion is to point out his right hand, which trembles. He is without the smile and the sharp glance of Mr. Lloyd George without his hush and sudden drop of the voice.

"Hitler is the Wagner of oratory, a master in repeating the *leitmotiv* in many varied forms, and the *leitmotiv* is: ‘The Republican régime in Germany has betrayed you. Retribution has come.’ His use of the brass instruments of oratory is Wagnerian, and he thunders out his resounding blows against Bolshevism and against democracy."

Hitler marches out and Jones follows him into the ante-chamber. "He is wet with perspiration. From the hall we hear 25,000 voices singing *Deutschland uber Alles*.

"We rush to the car. As we step out of the hall we see thousands of blazing torches, and we drive through an avenue of Brown Storm Troops, each man of which holds his torch in the left hand and stretches out his right hand in adoration to the leader, Adolf Hitler."

Jones had seen enough: "Germany is going full speed towards a Fascist Dictatorship. Now that Hitler has gained power he will cling to it. No considerations of constitutionalism will make him waver in his purpose."
Four days later, and a week before the election, the Reichstag building burned down. Jones wasn’t there but his colleague Sefton was. He paints a picture which in other circumstances we might even find amusing.

"I got there at a quarter to ten - just forty minutes after the first alarm had been given. Already there were quite a few people standing around, watching the flames funnelling up through the great glass dome in a pillar of fire and smoke. Every minute fresh trains of fire engines were arriving, their bells clanging as they raced through the streets.

"An excited policeman told me, ‘They’ve got one of them who did it, a man with nothing but his trousers on. He seems to have used his coat and shirt to start the fire. But there must be others still inside. They're looking for them there.’

"I saw a familiar figure: Dr. Alfred Rosenberg, Hitler’s number one adviser on foreign affairs. He had been driving home through the Tiergarten in his car, Rosenberg told me, when he noticed the fire.

‘I only hope,’ Rosenberg said gloomily, ‘that this is not the work of our chaps. It's just the sort of damn silly thing some of them might do!’ Which, whatever you may think about the origins of that fire, shows that there was at least one Nazi who had nothing to do with it.

"And then Karl Hanke, the bearded secretary of Dr. Goebbels, came puffing up. He had been compelled to leave his car, because the police would not let it through the cordon.

‘Hello Hanke,’ I said, ‘where are you off to?’

‘I am going inside to see what is happening,’ Hanke replied.

‘The Führer wants me to report to him. He is over at the Goebbels’s.’

‘Well I wish you’d report to me as well, when you get out.’

‘I will, old boy, I will,’ he promised, and rushed off.

It is generally believed that the Nazis enlisted Karl Ernst, a former hotel bellhop, to do the job, while pinning the blame on Marinus van der Lubbe, a former communist. Van der Lubbe was executed for the crime, while Karl Ernst was killed soon afterwards too, for lack of political correctness.

On March 5 Germany voted. Hitler did not win the outright majority he had hoped for. But he did get enough votes for a majority in the Reichstag, although by now it hardly mattered. The Nazis were unstoppable.

Time magazine reported: “Chancellor Hitler had merely gone to the German people under borrowed colors. He won a thundering cataclysmic victory with catchwords as loose as his slogan: Rebirth or Bolshevism.”
“Not dazzled by a promised new deal (for Chancellor Hitler made no specific election pledges whatsoever), Germans, hoping that somehow he will bring back the good old times, turned out in such numbers on the brilliant, balmy Election Sunday that 88% of the electorate cast ballots—an all-time record. Stay-at-homes got no peace from the Government radio, which sternly commanded every few minutes: ‘Do your duty! Get out and vote! Cast your ballot for the Government parties! Do it now!’"

Across the Atlantic former Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby made a speech in New York’s Battery Park: “Germany is captained by madmen. She is galloping to the brink of destruction. It is not far off. She has forfeited the respect of mankind and has invited the censures which are being heaped upon her by all people regardless of race, creed or nationality.”

It was a remarkable conjunction of world events. Within days of Hitler not winning the election – most of his support seems to have come from diehard Catholic areas where people swallowed Goebbels line about the Bolshevik takeover – a genuine victor, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was being inaugurated in the USA, King Kong was premiered at Radio City Music Hall New York City and the carvings on Mount Rushmore was dedicated. Soon after he declared a 10 day bank holiday, FDR was launching the first of his fireside radio talks.

Roosevelt went to be inaugurated in Washington DC. Hitler went back to Berlin, and Gareth Jones went - not back home to his beloved Barry in South Wales for fruitcake with auntie Betty - but to the USSR to expose the conspiracy to starve an entire population.

****
Afterword

In his brief life Jones interviewed Lenin’s widow, new Irish President Eamonn De Valera and Frank Lloyd Wright. He was dined by William Randolph Hearst (this lifelong teetotal would not have been “wined”), worked for the Liberal Prime Minister David Lloyd George, and fought a bitter campaign for journalistic truth in the columns of the New York Times with a Pulitzer prize-winner. At the same time he was squaring up against George Bernard Shaw, another apologist for the USSR.

In recent years Jones’s memory has been revived by his indefatigable niece and great-nephew, who have written his story from the point of view of his letters, articles and copious material in his notebooks, augmented by family memories.

He has won belated recognition among the Ukrainian community for his work in revealing to the world the scale of the dreadful famine in the USSR in the early 1930s. In 2009 his handwritten diary were displayed to the public for the first time, in an exhibition at Trinity, his old college at Cambridge University. Jones is also known for his very prescient work in his report from Germany in the crucial years of Hitler’s transition of power, when he chillingly predicted the coming Second World War. His family believes he may have been its first casualty.

Jones died tragically young, a fearless and honest exponent of his craft, having achieved so much, but with so much unfulfilled potential. Had he lived it is likely he would have become a great journalist.

He left a legacy of articles published in British newspapers including The Western Mail, The Times and the Manchester Guardian, in Germany in the Berliner Tageblatt and in American newspapers. Randolph Hearst personally commissioned a series of anti-Stalin articles he wrote for American newspapers.

On the news of Jones’s murder, former UK prime minister David Lloyd George wrote this appreciation in the London Evening Standard (26th August 1935).

“That part of the world is a cauldron of conflicting intrigue and one or other interests concerned probably knew that Mr Gareth Jones knew too much of what was going on... He had a passion for finding out what was happening in foreign lands wherever there was trouble, and in pursuit of his investigations he shrank from no risk... I had always been afraid that he would take one risk too many.”

http://www.garethjones.org