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# Murder In The Alps



**MYSTERY SOLVER**

**Original Story**  
**by Gene Dieckhoner**

Assemble the puzzle, read the story  
booklet, search for clues and solve  
the crime at the French Chalet.

## Murder In The Alps

“From my hiding place under the stairs in the old French chateau I could hear voices and footsteps but I only saw boots and legs. The cramped space and small peephole limited my ability to see what was going on around me.”

So began the memoirs of Lt. Al Horowitz as he related his experiences after he bailed out of his B-24 over France near the end of WW2. “I had the good fortune to be helped by Marie, a beautiful young Resistance fighter, who hid me in an abandoned mountain chateau until the Underground could get me out. I swore I would come back and thank her properly when the War was over,” Al continued.

Now, fifteen years after the War ended, Al was coming back to reunite with Marie and celebrate the opening of the chateau as a Winter lodge. There was a small group of other invited guests for the opening. They included: Jessica and Mildred Johnston, two elderly ladies who owned a chain of travel agencies in the U.S.; Dr. Jacob Solomon, a professor of Medieval History from Israel; Herman Schmidt, an investment banker from Switzerland; Retired Col. Stanley Roberts, formerly with the Monument Men in the US Army; and Marie’s father, Pierre Simone, winery owner and former mayor of the small village near the chateau.

The original owners of the chateau, Ruth and Joseph Krantz, had fled France just ahead of the German occupation and had not been heard from since. The townspeople, led by Pierre and financed by Mr. Schmidt, who insisted that only the top three floors be renovated, were hoping that a new resort would bring much needed tourist revenue back to the village. Al and Marie’s story was getting a lot of publicity in the US and the Johnston sisters were arranging for tours of the chateau. Mr. Solomon was doing research for a new book on the chateau and Colonel Roberts was returning to the scene of one of his failed searches for stolen art objects.

The group gathered in the main hall and was given a guided tour of the chateau by Pierre, dressed in his old ceremonial mayors sash. The top

floors, containing the guest bed- and bathrooms, had been remodeled and were beautifully decorated. The main stone floor had been left in its original condition, although Pierre said that he had to get some reproduction rugs to cover up the scrapes from the workers’ equipment.

Since it was fall in the Alps the Johnston sisters were both outfitted in furs; Jessica in a dark mink coat and Mildred in a Lynx cape. Mr. Solomon was a middle aged stocky bald man with a slight bent over posture. The Colonel and Mr. Schmidt could have been brothers, standing 6ft2in and 6ft4in respectively with slim and trim physiques. The only difference being the Colonel’s casual sweater as opposed to Schmidt’s sport coat and ski sweater.

Marie, dressed in the same peasant type outfit she wore when she helped him out of his parachute 15 years before, looked as beautiful as Al remembered. Now she was the hostess of the new Alpine Chateau Resort and Winery. During those dark days of WW2 Marie had taken a wounded and dazed Lt. Horowitz to the abandoned chateau and hid him in a secret “Priest’s Hole” underneath a stairway. Unbeknownst to her father, she kept Al supplied with food and water until he was well enough for the French Resistance to get him to Switzerland.

Due to his injuries, Al didn’t remember much of what happened while he was hidden away. All he could recall were the people walking back and forth past his hiding place speaking German and a repeating scraping sound. Occasionally he would hear truck sounds and get a glimpse of wrapped things being dragged past his peephole. This activity went on for the five days that Al was hiding there. The Germans pulled out of the town a few days after Al left because of the advancing Allied armies.

After the guided tour Pierre went to the wine cellar and the group split up to explore the chateau on their own. Mr. Schmidt drifted off to examine the many examples of medieval arms and armor throughout the chateau while Dr. Solomon was examining the paintings and tapestries on the walls. Mildred and Jessica went their separate ways to search all the nooks and crannies for interesting items for their travel brochures.

Marie and the now Major Horowitz were strolling in the garden getting re-acquainted when the cool fall air drove them back inside. As they walked down the staircase, under which Al had hidden, Marie noticed her father sitting in a large chair across the hall sound asleep. As she ran over and grabbed his hand she let out a piercing scream. “Papa! Papa!” Pierre slumped forward, revealing an antique dagger protruding from his back.

Marie’s screams brought all the other guests streaming to the hall from every direction. Mildred and Jessica came down the staircase and promptly fainted when they saw Pierre’s bloody body. Dr. Solomon went to check Pierre’s pulse while Col. Roberts went to find a phone to call for help. Mr. Schmidt, coming from a back hallway, tried to treat the wound but stopped when Mr. Solomon announced that Pierre was dead.

“Don’t touch anything,” the Colonel said after he had called the police.

The Colonel tried to get Mildred to give him her coat to cover Pierre but she refused. “The blood will ruin my beautiful Lynx fur,” She complained. Al took off his military jacket and handed it to the Colonel. “Here sir, use this please,” he stated. “Thanks, Major. I think it would be a good idea if you would take Marie upstairs until the police arrive,” the Colonel replied.

When the Chief of Police arrived, he gathered all the guests in the lower hall and questioned them as to their movements prior to Pierre being found. Everyone seemed to have been by themselves in the chateau except for Al and Marie and the Johnston sisters. While examining the body he found a small piece of fabric clutched in Pierre’s hand, with a fancy letter “f” painted on it. It was also obvious that the murder weapon had been taken down from a display of medieval daggers on the wall high above the chair.

To everyone’s surprise the Police Chief turned to Col. Roberts and asked him to take over the investigation. It seems that the Colonel was still on active duty and was still searching for treasures that the Nazis had stolen and hidden during the war.

“We have recently noticed that numerous items of value that disappeared during the war have been turning up at auction houses across the world. A large number of these came from families who fled this area of France during the German occupation.”

“Mr. Solomon’s family,” he continued, “were the previous owners of this chateau and is here to help us identify any stolen property. Our investigation has discovered that while Pierre was mayor, he collaborated with the German officer in charge of hiding stolen artworks in this chateau. After the war Pierre was contacted by the officer, who had changed his name and disappeared, and they set up a system to remove the artworks and sell them to the highest bidder.”

The Colonel paused and walked over to where the Johnston sisters were seated. “All they needed was a way to get their stolen loot out of the country and a respectable travel agency that would supply unwitting tourists to help them. Unfortunately for you ladies,” he chided, “these fur coats you’re wearing were among the items looted from Mr. Solomon’s family.”

“We were hoping Major Horowitz’s reunion with Marie and his return here might jog his memory and help us discover where the stolen works were hidden. Although he couldn’t give us the actual location, he was able to remember a scraping sound which gave me a valuable clue to the location of the the stolen works,” the Colonel continued. “Pierre’s murderer was his partner in crime, Herman Schmidt, previously known as Oberleutnant Franz Hart, the officer in charge of securing the artworks in the chateau.

## **Turn The Page For The Solution**

## SOLUTION

Col. Roberts, currently working for Army Intelligence, had traced recently auctioned stolen artworks to their original owners, including Mr. Solomon. Mr. Solomon had given the Colonel a list of artworks that his family left behind at the chateau when they fled the German occupation. Many of the items on the list had started showing up in reports from Customs officials around the world. It seemed a majority of the confiscations involved people on tours arranged by agencies owned by the Johnston sisters. An item of particular interest was a painting by Rembrandt with a torn corner by his signature that was on Mr. Solomon's list.

The local Police Chief, in cooperation with Col. Roberts, had been putting pressure on Pierre and felt he was ready to panic. They suspected Mr. Schmidt but could not gather enough proof to convict a respected Swiss banker. So they arranged the gathering at the grand opening of the resort, hoping either Al would remember the hiding place or Herman would give himself away.

Mr. Schmidt must have noticed Pierre's nervousness and confronted him in the lower hall. Pierre must have just come out of the secret room behind the large chair when Herman reached high up on the wall and grabbed the dagger. No one else in the group was tall enough to reach the dagger without a step stool.

Colonel Roberts pulled back the rug in front of the chair to reveal scrape marks in the stone floor. Attached to the wall next to the chair were two large medieval swords. The hilt of the sword on the right was shiny, due to frequent use, while the one on the left was dull and dusty. When he pulled on the sword, a section of the wall swung forward, revealing a large storeroom filled with stolen items.

## CLUES

Turned up rug on floor by chair.

Scars on the stone floor caused by the wall scraping as it opened.

Shiny hilt on sword from being pulled to open wall.

Outline of where the dagger was high on the wall.

Torn scrap of canvas with part of Rembrandt's signature. He often put a "f" after his name meaning "he made."