

Der Untergang explained

Film that portrays Hitler as a person rather than merely a monster



Director Oliver Hirschbiegel's latest production, **Der Untergang – Hitler und das Ende des 3. Reiches (Downfall)** is based on the book of the same name by renowned German historian Joachim Fest. The 65 day shoot in St. Petersburg and Munich resulted in a feature film, as well as a television mini series comprising two 90 minute films.

Opening on 20 July 1944, the day of an assassination attempt on

Hitler (played by Bruno Ganz), the feature film charts the increasing supremacy of the Red Army, the Hitler Youth groups and the suffering of the civilian population. The film's final moments culminate in the deaths of Hitler and Eva Braun (Juliane Köhler) at Berchtesgaden on 30 April 1945 and, the following day, the Goebbels family.

Swiss Director of Photography, Rainer Klausmann, whose cinematographic career has spanned thirty years, had previously collaborated with Hirschbiegel on several prize winning films, including **The Experiment**, which won the Bayerischer Filmpreis for Best Camera and Best Director. "**Der Untergang** is an unconventional

feature film; due to the events of that time, we chose the documentary style so that events were related as realistically and as straightforwardly as possible.

Talking about technique, I must say that for me technique is functional. I don't use fancy camera

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moves, pans and tilts when the scene doesn't call for it, just because it's in fashion nowadays! I'm more interested in storytelling and the acting. I prefer spending time on that and with the Director as well as

Kodak Vision 250D 5246, Klausmann worked for a month on location in St. Petersburg, before moving on to Bavaria Studios in Munich for a further 35 days to shoot the bunker scenes. "The reconstructed Führerbunker was small, only around 6 feet by 9 feet, so I had to do a lot of handholding and wide angle shots and the only lighting was from bare light bulbs. With 14 or 15 cast and crew members in such a confined, claustrophobic space, it got extremely hot and cramped and, after shooting for two or three hours at a time, we were glad to get out. But the extreme unease and proximity to the actors has created a real atmosphere," explains Klausmann.

"We encountered problems in St. Petersburg, which doubled as Berlin at the height of the war," he notes. "Since the city was destroyed and the streets were without lighting,

we had to find a way to light as if there was no light. It was a difficult task but, after a great deal of preparation, we settled on a large balloon with candlelight and flames," says Klausmann who also filmed in fire ravaged and smoke filled houses and streets.

"I shot with open stops in St. Petersburg and I was on the limits all the time, but I was really happy with my Kodak stocks. 5218 is such good material and so wonderful to work with. I was able to shoot unconcerned even in extreme situations. It served me pretty well to what was required."

the cast so I can create a component camera that is underlining the expression of a scene that the Director and his cast need," remarks Klausmann.

Selecting two ARRIcams, Kodak VISION2 500T 5218 and

Der Untergang attracted substantial interest at Cannes amongst international buyers. It was screened in German cinemas last autumn, followed by overseas distribution in 2005, the year that marks the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II. ■

