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BEFORE THE STORM

By James D. Shipman

CONFIDENTIAL



Book Club Kit

Inspired by the real-life husband and wife Nazi hunters Beate and Serge Klarsfeld, this thrilling, high-stakes Cold War novel from the bestselling author of *Irena's War* follows one couple's relentless pursuit of a fugitive Nazi scientist in the aftermath of WWII.



"Set in 1948 against the backdrop of the Berlin Blockade, this fast-moving Cold War thriller brings to life the shifting alliances that splintered the Allies in the years immediately following WWII... Shipman juxtaposes a pleasingly multifaceted crew of chasers and chased, including a lethal former SS sniper with a fondness for apple strudel. As readers attempt to sort out motives, the plot twists keep coming...Captures the chaos of the period." - **Booklist**

Dear Reader,

A couple years ago, I came across the story of Beate and Serge Klarsfeld, a real husband and wife team who have dedicated their lives to bringing Nazi war criminals to justice. Both of their childhoods were directly impacted by WWII and Serge's father was killed at Auschwitz, so when the couple learned many years later that former Nazis were not only living openly in Germany, but enjoying prominent government roles, they were appalled. They fought to bring the issue to international attention while tracking down and clinching convictions of numerous former Nazis and their collaborators, including Klaus Barbie, a.k.a. the "Butcher of Lyon." Their tireless and courageous dedication to justice is incredibly moving and became the seed of inspiration for *Before the Storm*.

Of course, the Nazi hunters in *Before the Storm* share little in common with the real-life Klarsfelds. The novel takes place in October 1948, when Sara Sturm is a young German woman working in Berlin after the war. She is assigned to look into an antisemitic vandalism attack on a local store, where she meets Max and Karl Portnoy, Jewish brothers whose family was killed during the Holocaust. Learning the man responsible for those deaths, a Nazi scientist named Heinz Hoffman, has eluded justice, Sara and the Portnoys are determined to track him down. This mission pits them against *Der Damon*, an assassin sent by Odessa, the super secret society made up of former SS officers, and sends them on a breakneck race throughout Europe, from the Tiergarten and Stasi Headquarters of Berlin, to the Soviet border, Bavaria's mountainous backroads and Schloss Leutstetten, and more.

While my previous novels have focused on WWII, *Before the Storm* takes place three years after it ended. It was a time when Nazi scientists were swooped up by the Americans and Soviets, and rather than being punished for their war crimes, they were given careers and homes in the United States and Russia. Jockeying for control and information, US and Russia raced to enlist potential spies and informants, even as the conflict between the two former allies escalated and threatened to spill into World War III.

I hope you enjoy this propulsive adventure as much as I loved writing it and I look forward to seeing your thoughts online if you tag **#BeforeTheStormBook** and/or **#JamesDShipman** on your posts!

Many thanks,

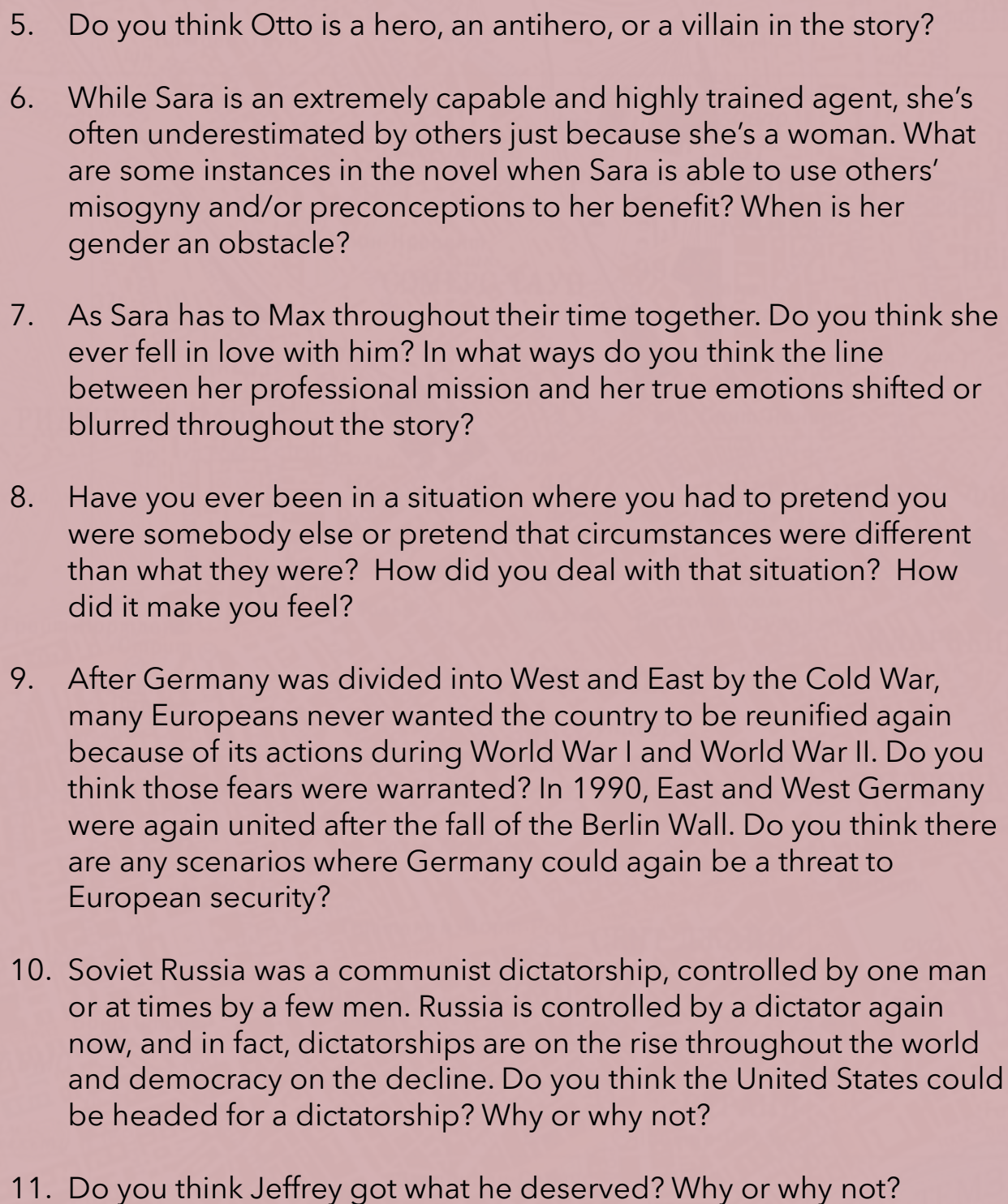
James D. Shipman, author of *Before the Storm*

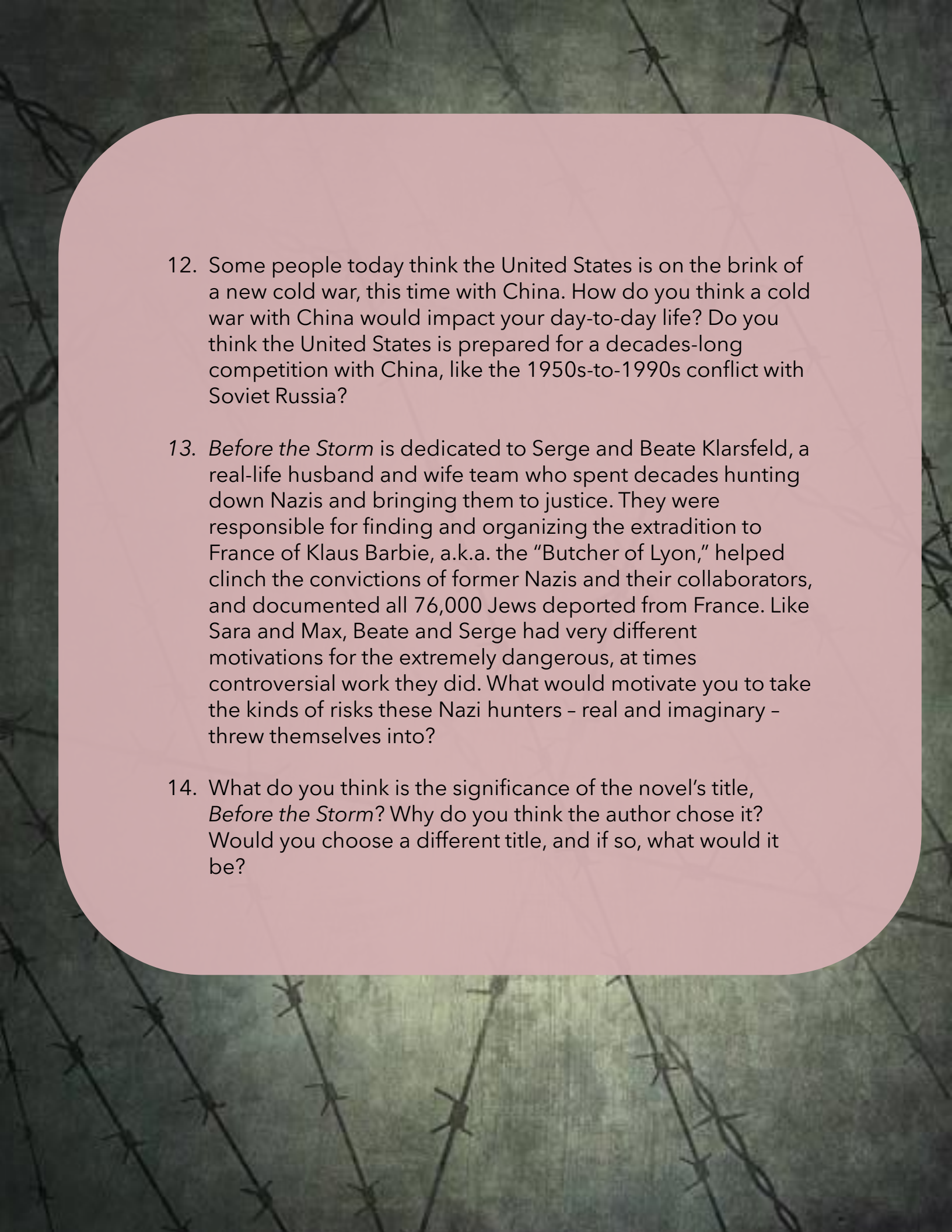


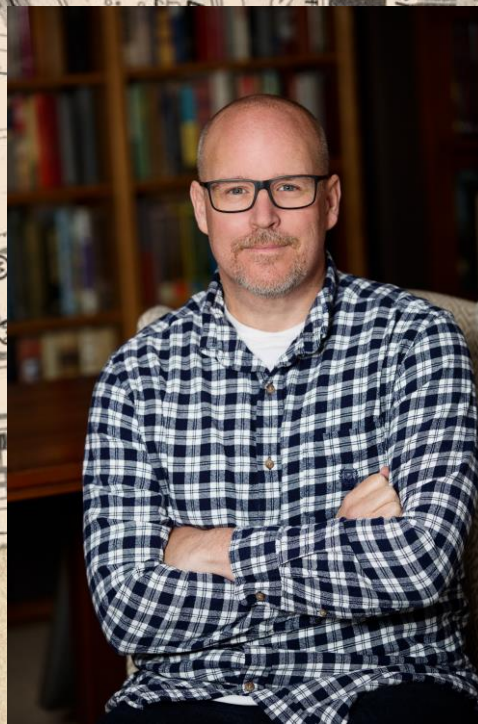
Discussion Questions
to spark conversation
and enhance your reading of
BEFORE THE STORM
BY JAMES D. SHIPMAN



1. Were you surprised to learn about Odessa (the Organization of former SS Members) and how the US sometimes assisted and even employed Nazis after World War II? Do you think it was ethical for the US government to work with war criminals? Was it appropriate to do so for the sake of national security and the advancement of nuclear and rocket technology? Why or why not?
2. Germany was a fascinating and tragic place in the immediate aftermath of World War II. Although the United States provided resources to Europe, the victim nations such as France, Holland, Belgium, and Denmark were given priority, while the German people suffered from food and fuel shortages. The average person spent the postwar years simply trying to survive. Do you think denying resources to all Germans was a fair and appropriate response to the Nazi wrongdoings? Why or why not? Do you think the countries that win a war have a responsibility to the citizens of the defeated countries?
3. As a German whose family emigrated to America during the war, Sara is in many ways caught between two worlds and an outsider in both. Other Germans view her as being American and blame her for their suffering, while Jewish survivors and Americans are suspicious of her because she's German. Do you think her outsider status allows her to be a better agent? Why or why not?
4. Early in the novel when Max is cracking jokes amidst the ruins of his vandalized store, he says, "If I didn't laugh, I'd only be able to cry." Have you ever been in a sad or stressful situation where you were surprised to see other people laughing - or have yourself tried to lighten the mood with humor? Do you think it's ok to have that kind of reaction to negative or tragic circumstances?

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5. Do you think Otto is a hero, an antihero, or a villain in the story?
 6. While Sara is an extremely capable and highly trained agent, she's often underestimated by others just because she's a woman. What are some instances in the novel when Sara is able to use others' misogyny and/or preconceptions to her benefit? When is her gender an obstacle?
 7. As Sara has to Max throughout their time together. Do you think she ever fell in love with him? In what ways do you think the line between her professional mission and her true emotions shifted or blurred throughout the story?
 8. Have you ever been in a situation where you had to pretend you were somebody else or pretend that circumstances were different than what they were? How did you deal with that situation? How did it make you feel?
 9. After Germany was divided into West and East by the Cold War, many Europeans never wanted the country to be reunified again because of its actions during World War I and World War II. Do you think those fears were warranted? In 1990, East and West Germany were again united after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Do you think there are any scenarios where Germany could again be a threat to European security?
 10. Soviet Russia was a communist dictatorship, controlled by one man or at times by a few men. Russia is controlled by a dictator again now, and in fact, dictatorships are on the rise throughout the world and democracy on the decline. Do you think the United States could be headed for a dictatorship? Why or why not?
 11. Do you think Jeffrey got what he deserved? Why or why not?

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12. Some people today think the United States is on the brink of a new cold war, this time with China. How do you think a cold war with China would impact your day-to-day life? Do you think the United States is prepared for a decades-long competition with China, like the 1950s-to-1990s conflict with Soviet Russia?
13. *Before the Storm* is dedicated to Serge and Beate Klarsfeld, a real-life husband and wife team who spent decades hunting down Nazis and bringing them to justice. They were responsible for finding and organizing the extradition to France of Klaus Barbie, a.k.a. the "Butcher of Lyon," helped clinch the convictions of former Nazis and their collaborators, and documented all 76,000 Jews deported from France. Like Sara and Max, Beate and Serge had very different motivations for the extremely dangerous, at times controversial work they did. What would motivate you to take the kinds of risks these Nazi hunters - real and imaginary - threw themselves into?
14. What do you think is the significance of the novel's title, *Before the Storm*? Why do you think the author chose it? Would you choose a different title, and if so, what would it be?



James D. Shipman is the bestselling author of historical fiction, including the acclaimed novels *Irena's War*, *Beyond the Wire*, *Task Force Baum*, and *Before the Storm*. Born and raised in the Pacific Northwest, he began publishing short stories and poems while earning a degree in history from the University of Washington and a law degree from Gonzaga University. Now a practicing attorney, he lives with his family in Washington State.

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BEFORE THE STORM by James D. Shipman

Kensington Books, an imprint of Kensington Publishing Corp.

On Sale: February 21, 2023 / Trade Paperback Original
Historical Fiction / \$16.95 (\$22.95 CAN) / ISBN: 9781496736734

Author Residence: **Everett, WA**
Novel Setting: **Post-WWII Europe**

Locations in *BEFORE THE STORM*



Stasi Headquarters in East Berlin



Tiergarten in Berlin



Tempelhof Airport

(In the novel, the US Department of Public Affairs, where Sara works, is headquartered near here)



Marienplatz



Franciscan Monastery in Bavaria

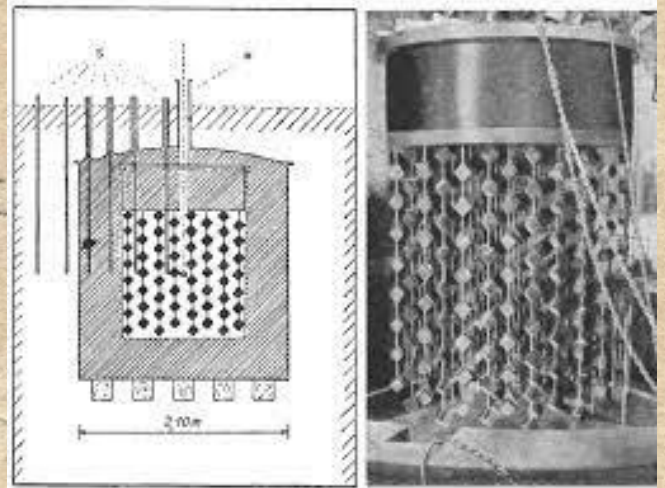


**Schloss Leutstetten
(Prince Rupprecht's Castle)**



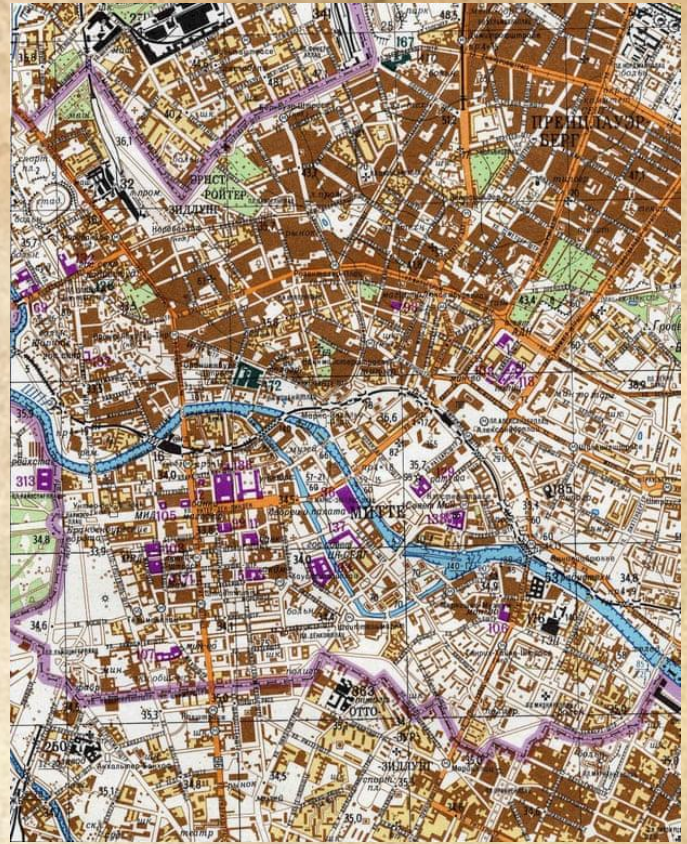
**Rupprecht, Crown Prince of Bavaria
with his second wife (L) and children (R)**

Cold War Era Germany



German Nuclear Reactor
B-VIII





Russian spy map of Berlin

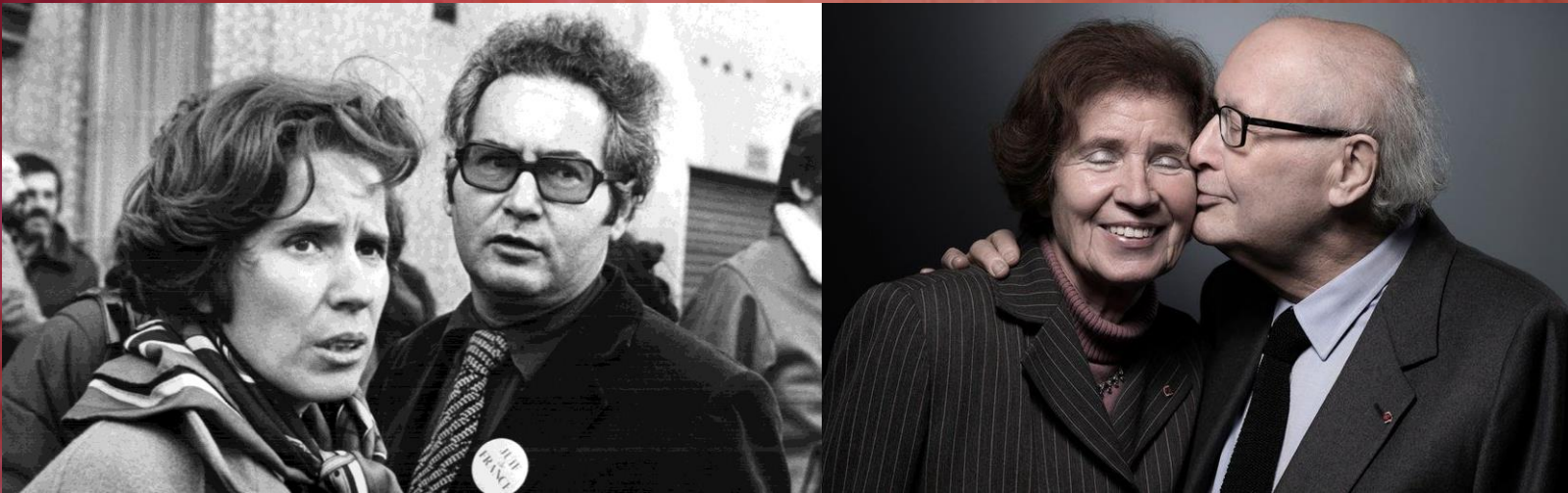


Otto Skorzeny



Cold War dossier

Real-Life Nazi Hunters



Beate and Serge Klarsfeld



Simon Wiesenthal



Tuviah Friedman



Efraim Zuroff