

## FRESH DOUBT ABOUT SUICIDE THEORY

### Was 'Mad' King Ludwig Murdered?

By Conny Neumann (From Der Spiegel)



**For over a century, Crazy King Ludwig's death has been ruled a suicide. But now, a new theory, based on a mysterious, bullet-ridden coat, has it that the Bavarian monarch, builder of Bavaria's fairytale castles, was actually shot. And maybe he wasn't insane after all.**

Mystery has surrounded the death of Bavarian King Ludwig II, better known as "Mad King Ludwig," ever since his body was found in Lake Starnberg near Munich on June 13, 1886.

The death of the eccentric ruler who built the fantasy castles that still attract tourists from around the world today, the most famous being Neuschwanstein Castle, was officially ruled as suicide by drowning after a cursory examination.

He had been officially deposed by the Bavarian government three days earlier on the grounds of insanity, and his father's younger brother, Prince Luitpold, was declared regent. A psychiatrist had declared that Ludwig was suffering from "paranoia." But he was never properly examined and conspiracy theories persist to this day.

Now the statement of a Munich banker has fuelled speculation that King Ludwig II was murdered. Detlev Utermöhle, 60, has made a sworn deposition in which he recalls an interesting incident from his childhood.

He was 10 years old at the time and had been taken by his mother, Gertrud Utermöhle, to a tea party hosted by her friend Josephine Gräfin von Wrba-Kaunitz, a countess who had managed the assets of a line of the royal House of Wittelsbach, King Ludwig's family.

### Mysterious Coat

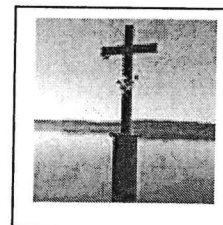
Detlev recalls that after the coffee and cakes the countess drew her guests together and said in a whispered tone: "Now, without the knowledge of the descendants of the former King Ludwig II, you can all find out the truth about the circumstances of his death. I will now show you the coat he wore on the day of his death."

The party walked to a chest and the countess took out a gray woollen coat and held it up against the light. Detlev Utermöhle says he saw the coat "with two bullet holes in the back." He said his mother, who has since died, also left him a written account of the scene.

His statement has breathed new life into the long-held theory espoused by Ludwig supporters and many historians that the king was murdered.

The official version that has held for more than a century is that the Bavarian government deposed Ludwig because he was sinking increasing sums of money into the construction of new fairytale monuments which were supposedly driving his kingdom into financial ruin -- ironically, those buildings have since proven such an alluring draw for tourists that they have paid for themselves many times over.

Psychiatrist Bernhard von Gudden declared him insane, Ludwig lost his crown and reacted by killing himself in a fit of madness, the version goes. Gudden, who joined Ludwig on the fateful lakeside walk on the evening of June 13, was also found dead in the lake.



## Shots in the Night

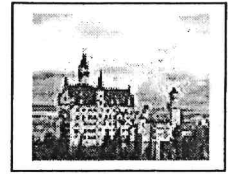
But this version has weaknesses. Fishermen near the bank of the lake reported hearing shots fired. Many Ludwig researchers, among them the Berlin author Peter Glowasz, believe that Ludwig opponents in the Bavarian government hired two assassins to kill him to prevent the ex-king from becoming a problem in the future. The killers waited in a boathouse by the lake and shot both Ludwig and the only witness, Doctor Gudden.

But there was never any evidence to back up the murder theory. And it's unclear whether Utermöhle's statement is worth anything. How reliable is the recollection of a 10-year-old, 50 years on? Isn't it possible that Countess Wrba-Kaunitz -- who was doubtless close to the Wittelsbach family -- was playing a joke on the ladies she had invited for coffee? Did she just show them two moth holes in some old coat?

The House of Wittelsbach dismisses talk of a conspiracy. Ludwig's descendants have believed in the suicide theory for over a century. And they steadfastly refuse to allow the king's corpse to be exhumed from its tomb in Munich's St. Michael's church to be examined.

And unfortunately, the mysterious coat has disappeared as well. Countess Wrba-Kaunitz and her husband died in 1973 in a house fire and the coat was lost in the aftermath of their deaths.

Glowasz keeps trying to get the Wittelsbachs to OK an exhumation. He says he knows Swiss scientists who would be able to examine the body without touching it, by conducting a virtual autopsy with a scanner and computer tomography. That would suffice to show any bullet wounds.



## Sloppy Autopsy

Ludwig's body was examined immediately after his death but that autopsy was extremely sloppy. Berlin forensic expert Volkmar Schneider doubts the conclusion that he drowned. He has read the autopsy report and says it makes no mention of the usual signs of drowning -- foam in the mouth and nose or lake water in the lungs. On the other hand, the documents contain no reference to gunshot wounds either.

The examination was conducted by Ludwig's doctor in 1886. But Glowasz claims the doctor was pressured by Bavarian government officials to keep [mute] about the bullet wounds.

The murder theorists recently received backing from a Munich psychiatrist. Professor Hans Förstl, who works at the clinic of Munich's Technical University, waded through a secret archive of Wittelsbach family documents and found out that Ludwig suffered from a form of meningitis shortly after he was born. The disease may have shrunken parts of his brain -- the king's skull was remarkably small, the autopsy report said.

The documents show that Gudden never properly examined Ludwig and had based his diagnosis on conversations he had had with people who knew the king.

Förstl said the type of meningitis Ludwig suffered from might have explained his building craze, his aggressive behavior towards servants, his day dreams and isolation. People with shrunken brains can be like that: obstinate, selfish, sometimes unacceptable -- but the disease doesn't necessarily drive them to suicide.