

ALEXANDRA OF MECKLENBURG-SCHWERIN'S TIARA: PART 3

*A robbery, an arrest, and the threat
of nuclear war.
No big deal.*

FILE UNDER: **TIARAS**

WANT ME TO READ THIS POST TO YOU?



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THIS IS PART THREE of the story of Alexandra of Mecklenburg-Schwerin's tiara. If you haven't read [part 1](#) or [part 2](#), start there – we'll be picking up Alix's story right where I left off. As we conclude the story of her life, we'll find out what happened to the tiara – or at least make an educated guess. As you'll see, this story's paper trail gets harder to chase the further we go.

When we last left Alix and her family in May of 1945, they were refugees at Schloss Glücksburg in the German province of Schleswig-Holstein. Alix and her terminally ill husband, Friedrich Franz, had fled Schloss Ludwigslust as the Soviet army approached. But there was someone else also at Glücksburg – someone infamous, someone the Allies wanted to get their hands on at any cost.

THE LAST NAZIS STANDING

AFTER HITLER'S SUICIDE ON April 30, 1945 and the Red Army's capture of Berlin, Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz and other high-ranking Nazis formed a transitional government in Flensburg.



**BUNDESARCHIV BILD 146-1976-127-06A /
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Flensburg was the last free port in north Germany, a naval base close to the Danish border. Ships arrived daily with refugees from East Prussia, along with trainloads of concentration camp evacuees. The streets were full of the lost, fleeing, sick, injured, and starving.

Dönitz didn't care about them.

He wanted to turn the British and the Americans against the Soviets. He thought that maybe, if those two focused on fighting each other, his new Nazi-light regime would

survive. Dönitz hung Hitler's picture in his new headquarters at the Flensburg Naval Cadet School, which spread out over four miles.



**THE CADET SCHOOL, MARINEAKADEMIE MÜRNIK,
IN 1929. IMAGE BY **KZS R. ROSSOW** (†1941),
CC BY-SA 3.0 DE VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.**

You know what was at the eastern end of those four miles? Schloss Glücksburg. Yes, that's right – Alix's new next-door neighbors were the last Nazis standing.

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Among them was Albrecht Speer, the new Minister of Economics and Production. Speer was an architect who turned out to be an organizational genius. He became Hitler's Minister of Armaments in 1942 and used 14 million slave laborers to keep the German war machine running. (Sereny, 292)

But in 1945, when Hitler advocated a scorched earth policy to deter the invading Soviets, Speer turned on his boss. He refused to destroy the German industry he'd spent years building.



SPEER AND HITLER. BUNDESARCHIV BILD 183-V00555-3 / CC-BY-SA 3.0, CC BY-SA 3.0 DE VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

According to Speer's secretary, his assistants asked Casimir's uncle if they could stay at Schloss Glücksburg now that the new Nazi government was headquartered at Flensburg. Casimir's uncle had already asked the British authorities if they wanted to use Glücksburg, but they had turned him down. So he opened it to a host of German refugees, including Speer.

Speer and his entourage moved right in with Alix, her family, and the other royal refugees. Every night, they had dinner together, served by the duke of Schleswig-Holstein's cook. Can you imagine a stranger situation?

Now, the Allies knew some heinous war criminals were hanging out in Flensburg. Himmler was there, as was the commander of Auschwitz.

A British brigadier straight-up saw Himmler skulking down a hallway at the Flensburg headquarters and asked the senior German officer, "Hey, isn't that Heinrich freaking Himmler skulking down your hallway?"

"Those aren't the droids you're looking for," said the German.



HIMMLER AND SOLDIERS IN 1944. IMAGE BY HERMANN EGE, BUNDESARCHIV [BILD 183-J27809](#) / CC-BY-SA 3.0, CC BY-SA 3.0 DE VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

But Admiral Dönitz knew the Jedi mind trick would only work for so long. Himmler was kryptonite, so Dönitz sent him away with false papers, advising him to disguise himself as a sailor and disappear. Himmler left on May 10 with a clever disguise consisting of—wait for it—an eye patch.

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But British intelligence services thought he might still be in the area, and set to work looking for him. Their search was about to put them on a collision course with Alix and her family.

THE UNIVERSITY OF BOMBING

THE UNITED STATES STRATEGIC Bombing Survey (USSBS) desperately wanted to pick Albrecht Speer's brain before he was arrested. Because Flensburg was in the British-controlled sector of Germany, it was up to them to arrest him. But until they did, he was fair game. So Paul Nitze, Vice-Chairman of the USSBS, sent two German-speaking assistants on a manhunt to find him.



PAUL NITZE. U.S. NAVY, PUBLIC DOMAIN
VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

It only took them two days.

One of the men, George Sklarz, said they found Speer in what he described as a “great big castle that looked deserted except for some little kids playing in the park.”
(Sereny, 549)

Inside, Sklarz and his men found a sign thumbtacked to a door: “Reichsminister Speer.” They knocked and a voice said “Herein.” They recognized Speer, and Speer recognized their uniforms.

This was Nazi hunting as if it were choreographed by Staples: yeah, that was easy.

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Speer folded like laundry, telling the Americans everything they wanted to know. He spent the next ten days weaving words like Scheherazade, well aware that his life depended on making a good impression. Speer later described this strange interlude as a “university of bombing.” (Speer, 500) It all took place in beautiful rooms like the one you see here.



SCHLOSS GLÜCKSBURG'S ROTERSAAL.
IMAGE BY **BECKSTET**, CC BY-SA 3.0
VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

The whole time, Alix and her family had to tiptoe around the situation, doing as little as possible to attract attention.

OPERATION BLACKOUT

EVERYTHING CHANGED ON MAY 23, when the British launched Operation Blackout.

Early that morning, the Cheshire Anti-Tank Platoon under Major Gordon Craig surrounded Schloss

Glücksburg. They rolled up with tanks and six-pound guns aimed at the castle.



SCHLOSS GLÜCKSBURG BY **ELENA MARIE MEYER**,
CC BY-SA 4.0 VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

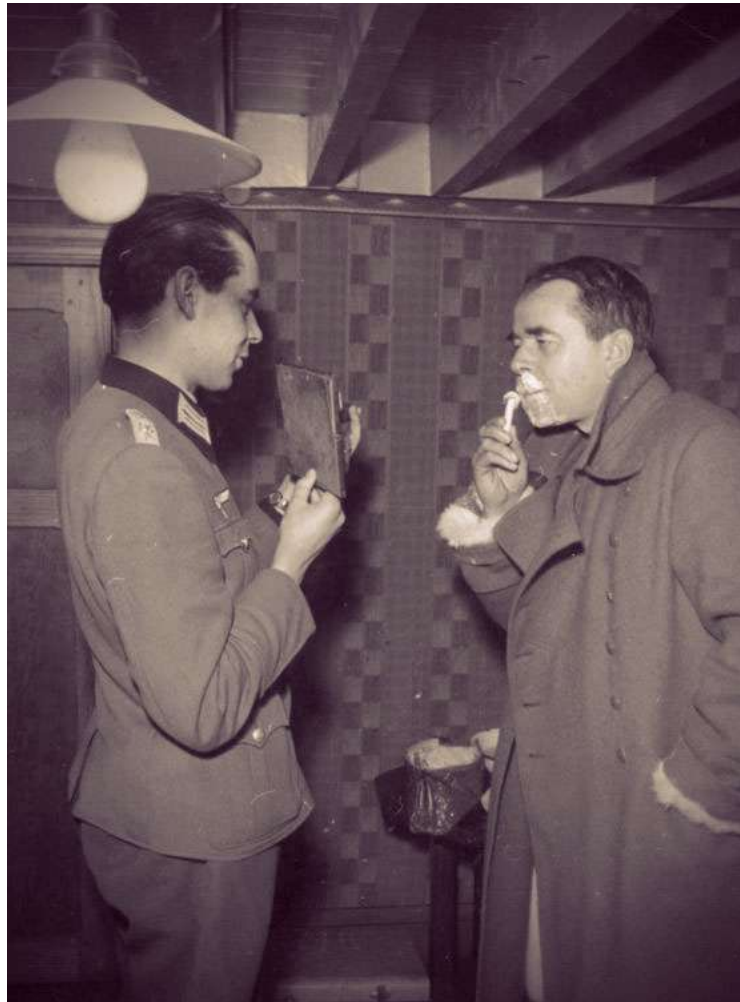
Ten to twenty soldiers rushed the drawbridge and stormed inside. Speer later described the invasion like this: “Everybody else was still in bed, and I’m afraid that included the luckless Mecklenburg-Holsteins, who had been kind hosts to me and were now very rudely awakened.” (Speer, 555)

Karin, Alix's daughter-in-law, later described the situation like this: "One morning I woke up and an officer was standing in front of my bed with a pistol. And he said, 'What's your name? Get out!' And then we looked out and we could see that the whole castle, the castle lake, was surrounded with tanks. And inside the castle, tommies with Sten guns were rushing all about..." (*"After the War"*)

All the refugee royals – including Alix's five-months-pregnant daughter Anastasia – were forced out of their rooms and marched at gunpoint into the courtyard so the British could search for Speer.

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They found him shaving in a cloakroom downstairs. “So now the end has come,” Speer said. “That’s good. It was all only kind of an opera anyway.” (Thompson, 15)



ME: “I’M NEVER GOING TO FIND AN IMAGE OF SPEER SHAVING.” WIKIMEDIA COMMONS: “HOLD MY BEER.” IMAGE FROM BUNDESARCHIV, BILD 183-2004-0312-501 / CC-BY-SA 3.0, CC BY-SA 3.0 DE VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

But just because Speer was gone didn't mean the soldiers were finished.

They still had to search the place for other high-ranking Nazis. But all they found was the refugee royals' possessions.

An embedded Australian reporter described the scene like this: "The women's dressing tables were crowded with cosmetics and perfumes, drawers were filled with silk stockings and hand embroidered underclothes, and wardrobes were packed with fine dresses and furs. The cellars were amply supplied with wine and brandy, and two cellars were crammed with old, hand-carved coffins." (*The Age*, May 25, 1945)

And when the soldiers saw these luxury goods, they started taking them.



A BEDROOM IN SCHLOSS GLÜCKSBURG. IMAGE BY ALTERWOLF49, CC BY-SA 3.0 VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

Here's how Karin, Alix's daughter-in-law, described the situation: "...we went out into the courtyard and all the time the little tommies were going in with small sacks and coming out with big ones and they threw them on the lorry and we didn't know what was going on." (*After the War*)

In a later statement, Alix herself said, "...we saw the soldiers going back to the lorry. Their pockets were filled, and in their hands they held little sacks filled with

jewels. The Grand Duke found one soldier breaking open a cupboard.” (*The People*, January 23, 1949)

“...we saw the soldiers going back to the lorry. Their pockets were filled, and in their hands they held little sacks filled with jewels.”

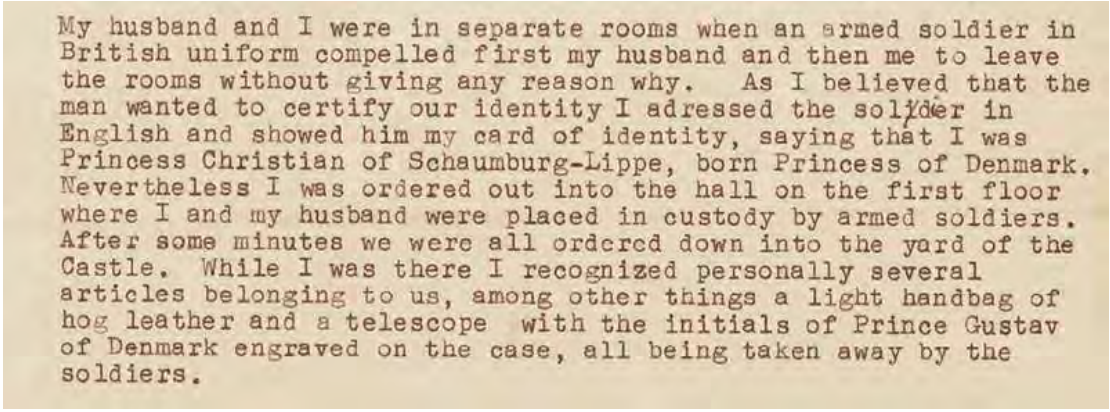
When Friedrich Franz saw soldiers smashing boxes and trunks and walking away with their hands full of jewels, he asked them to stop. According to a later report by Casimir, some of the soldiers tossed the stolen items away as he approached them.

But the soldiers weren't content with raiding the castle's guest rooms. They also smashed 38 coffins in the cellar, looking for hidden treasure. They drank some of the wine and brandy they found there, leaving empty bottles in the coffins.

When the soldiers finally let Alix and her family back inside, the women ran to check on their jewelry.

Feodora's entire jewel case was missing, as were random

items including 10 pairs of silk stockings, gloves, and an envelope of cash. Feodora tried to persuade Major Craig to make the soldiers give their stuff back, but he refused.

A photograph of a typed letter on aged, yellowish paper. The text is in a simple, monospaced font. The letter describes a military incident where the author and her husband were taken into custody by British soldiers. She mentions showing her identity card as Princess Christian of Schaumburg-Lippe and lists stolen items like a handbag and a telescope.

My husband and I were in separate rooms when an armed soldier in British uniform compelled first my husband and then me to leave the rooms without giving any reason why. As I believed that the man wanted to certify our identity I adressed the soldier in English and showed him my card of identity, saying that I was Princess Christian of Schaumburg-Lippe, born Princess of Denmark. Nevertheless I was ordered out into the hall on the first floor where I and my husband were placed in custody by armed soldiers. After some minutes we were all ordered down into the yard of the Castle. While I was there I recognized personally several articles belonging to us, among other things a light handbag of hog leather and a telescope with the initials of Prince Gustav of Denmark engraved on the case, all being taken away by the soldiers.

FEODORA'S LETTER ASKING FOR COMPENSATION FOR HER STOLEN ITEMS. BRITISH NATIONAL ARCHIVES FO-371-105789-12; FILE AVAILABLE TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC ONLINE.

Karin described the situation as being almost funny. She later said: "...And every time we went out, the guard would ask us friendly, 'Well, has your jewelry come back yet?' And we'd say, 'No, 'cause you pinched it,' and then we'd all laugh. They were always very friendly and just wonderful..." (*"After the War"*)

Wonderful...except for the tens of thousands of dollars of heirloom jewels they stole, of course.

The next day, one of the platoon's leaders – Lieutenant F.B. Walker – came back to the castle and told Feodora

that he regretted what had happened.

Regret and \$5 will get you a latte at Starbucks.

A MOTHER'S NIGHTMARE

THERE WAS NOTHING ALIX could do about her missing jewels other than file a complaint.

Her son-in-law, Casimir, sent that complaint all the way up the food chain, to King George VI of England, the Allied Control Council in Berlin, King Gustav of Sweden, and King Frederick of Denmark.

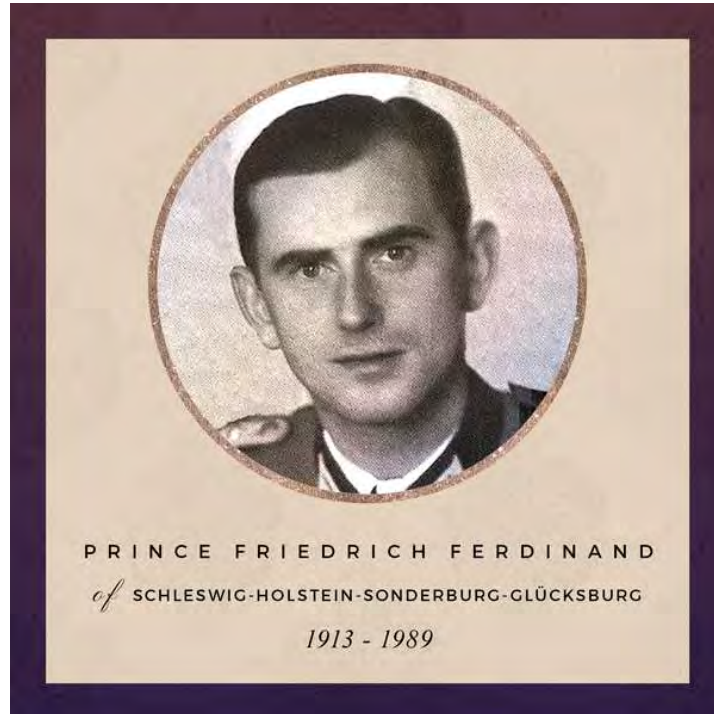


IMAGE VIA [FINDAGRAVE.COM](https://www.findagrave.com).

But pretty soon, she had bigger problems than missing jewels.

Her second son, Christian Ludwig, had stayed at Ludwigslust, possibly keeping an eye on anything he and his father had hidden.

Now, with British permission, he brought Alix and Friedrich Franz back home to Ludwigslust. But their homecoming was short-lived.

The Americans, British, Russians, and French had divided Germany into sectors they would each manage and police in the aftermath of the war.

Ludwigslust was going to be in the Soviet sector. The scheduled date for the handover was July 1, 1945.



MAP BY **WIKINIGHT**, CC BY SA 3.0 VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.
RECOLORED & CAPTIONS ADDED BY YOURS TRULY.

On that morning, a British brigadier offered them his Mercedes. Alix and Friedrich Franz left at 7:30 a.m. They took two wagons of furniture and whatever they could carry back to Schloss Glücksburg. Alix also later stated that she took *all* her jewels out of Ludwigslust.

Christian Ludwig stayed behind with his father's power of attorney. At 10 a.m. that morning, the British lowered their flag from Ludwigslust. At 11 a.m., the Soviets arrived. When they recognized the portraits of Tsar Alexander I and Tsar Nicholas I hanging on the castle walls, Christian Ludwig told them how his family was related to the Romanovs, through a daughter of Tsar Paul I.

"Cool story, bro," they said. "Now get out of here before we kill you."

"Cool story, bro," the Soviets told Christian Ludwig. "Now get out of here before we kill you."

But Christian Ludwig didn't go far. He moved into the administration building next door. A few days later, a Soviet general told him to leave or he'd be killed. He stayed. On July 16, 1945, they arrested him.

So why did he stay? Was there buried treasure...or was he just safeguarding his inheritance, making sure no one burned the castle down? In the letters he sent to his

parents, he said he was trying to convince the Soviets to turn the palace into a museum. It didn't work.

But Christian Ludwig wasn't the only family member in trouble.

On November 9, a Royal Air Force Security section arrested Friedrich Franz. The arrest was probably a matter of protocol, as the Allied forces tried to figure out who needed to be investigated for war crimes and who could be safely released. At the time, Glücksburg was being used as a detention center for former military officers, and he was told not to leave.



IMAGE VIA [FINDAGRAVE.COM](https://www.findagrave.com).

That wasn't a problem, because Friedrich Franz was living on borrowed time. We don't know exactly what his illness was, but it required frequent blood transfusions. In the chaos after the end of the war, it became even harder to get them and his condition deteriorated rapidly.

When it looked like he wasn't going to make it to December, word was sent to his sister, Queen Alexandrine of Denmark: Friedrich Franz wanted to see her one more time.



**QUEEN ALEXANDRINE, SCANNED FROM MY COPY
OF BO BRAMSEN'S Huset Glücksburg, Vol 2.**

Alexandrine grabbed some champagne bottles from her cellar and had an intelligence service officer drive her to Glücksburg. It all had to be done in secret, because no member of the Danish royal family could be seen showing sympathy for anyone in Nazi Germany, family member or not.

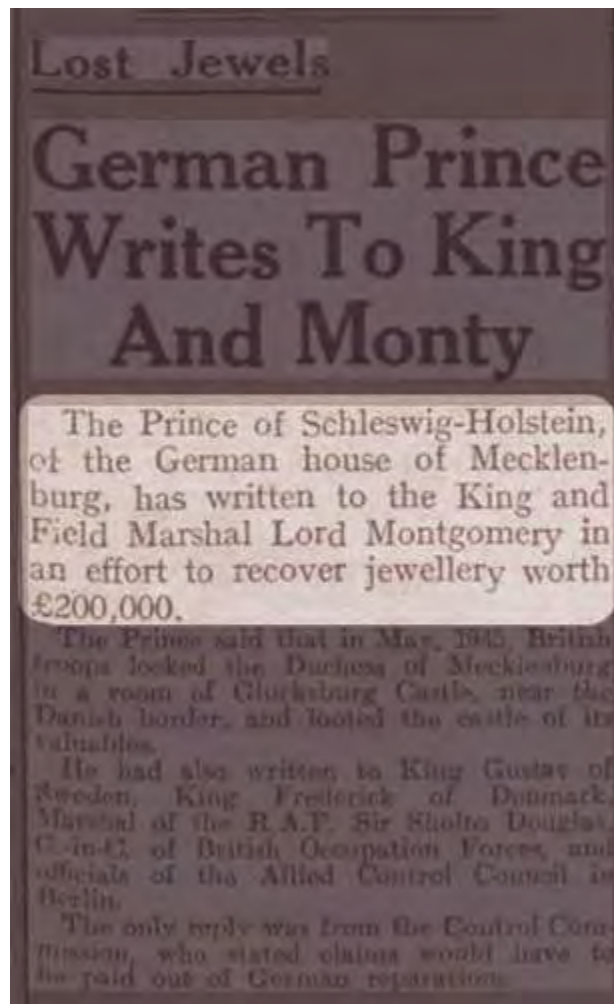
Alexandrine grabbed some champagne bottles from her cellar and had an intelligence service officer drive her to Glücksburg.

She made it in time, and said her last goodbye. Friedrich Franz went into the Flensburg hospital for an operation, and died there on November 17. He was only 62.

Our heroine was now a homeless widow with a missing son.

After Friedrich Franz's death, Alix's son-in-law, Casimir, took charge as head of the family. He filed a claim with the British on Alix's behalf, asking for reimbursement for her missing jewels. She described

them as gifts and family heirlooms from the British royal family and the Russian imperial family. Newspapers estimated those jewels to be worth anywhere from \$2.5 to \$14.7 million, in today's currency.



SCREENSHOT OF THE DUNDEE EVENING TELEGRAPH FOR AUGUST 21, 1947 VIA BRITISH NEWSPAPER ARCHIVE.

Finally, in 1948, the British made an offer of compensation. The Control Commission in the British occupation zone estimated the total worth of her loss at

511 reichsmarks, and paid Alix 10% of that amount in deutschmarks. That amounted to £4,250 (roughly \$290,800 in today's currency). (British National Archives FO 944-295-1)

Casimir thought they were lowballing her and filed a protest.

Then, in 1949, there was a breakthrough on the case – Scotland Yard found some of the missing jewels. A detective met Alix in Kiel to show them to her, but she was only able to identify four of them as hers. According to Casimir, 58 pieces of Alix's jewels were still missing. (*Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 2 Aug 1949)

As far as I know, none of them were ever recovered and no one was ever prosecuted for the theft.

A MOTHER'S DREAM

CASIMIR ALSO TRIED TO help find her missing son. Alix's friends sent money to help with the search, but everything just led to a dead end. Then, some devastating news arrived: a distant cousin sent a

telegram of condolence. He'd heard from someone in Soviet captivity that Christian Ludwig was dead.



**ALIX WITH HER DAUGHTER, THYRA, AND CASIMIR.
MARLENE EILERS KOENIG COLLECTION, USED WITH
PERMISSION.**

But Alix didn't believe it – she *couldn't* believe it. Whether it was mother's intuition or blind hope, she refused to act as if he were dead without having any evidence.

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he were dead without any evidence.

Finally, in 1953, after Joseph Stalin's death, West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer intervened on behalf of all German POWs still in the Soviet Union. Many of those POWs were released and sent to the displaced persons camp in Friedland, Germany. When Alix heard the news, she hoped that Christian Ludwig would be among them.



**FRIEDLAND DISPLACED PERSONS CAMP. BUNDESARCHIV, B 145
BILD-F005100-0011A / STEINER, EGON / CC-BY-SA 3.0, CC BY-SA
3.0 DE VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.**

But months passed after the initial transports arrived, with no news of her son.

Finally, that December, Princess Marianne of Hesse found Christian Ludwig in a prisoner convoy headed for Friedland. After his arrest, he'd been flown to Moscow, held in the Lubyanka prison, and sentenced to 25 years.

He had served 8 of them before being released.

On New Year's Eve of 1953, Alix was reunited with her son.

Most of the family had already gathered for Christmas, including Alix's daughters Thyra and Anastasia, and her son-in-law Casimir.

The family got a little bigger the next year, when Christian Ludwig married Barbara, a granddaughter of Prince Heinrich of Prussia and Princess Irene of Hesse and by Rhine.



BACK ROW: DUKE CHRISTIAN LUDWIG OF MECKLENBURG, DUCHESS BARBARA, HEREDITARY GRAND DUKE FRIEDRICH FRANZ AND HIS WIFE, KARIN. MIDDLE ROW: DUCHESS THYRA OF MECKLENBURG, PRINCESS ELISABETH OF SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN, GRAND DUCHESS ALEXANDRA OF MECKLENBURG-SCHWERIN, PRINCESS IRENE OF SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN, PRINCESS ANASTASIA OF SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN. FRONT ROW: DUCHESS DONATA AND EDWINA OF MECKLENBURG, PRINCESS SIBYLLA OF SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN AND PRINCE FRIEDRICH FRANZ OF SCHLESWIG HOLSTEIN. 1963. MARLENE EILERS KOENIG COLLECTION, USED WITH PERMISSION.

Life had come full circle, taking her from a young grand duchess to a white-haired grandmother.

OPERATION BLUE THREAD

BUT THE DRAMA WASN'T over just yet. In the early 1960s, there was a very real fear that the Soviet Union would invade West Germany.

This was a problem for the British government because there were a handful of royals closely related to Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip who would then be under Soviet rule. What if the Soviets used them for propaganda purposes? It couldn't be allowed to happen.



PROPAGANDA POSTER, SOCIETY FOR GERMAN-SOVIET FRIENDSHIP. IMAGE BY **RAKoon**, CC BY-SA 4.0 VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

So officials in the British Foreign Office picked 38 royals they'd swoop in and rescue if the Soviets made a move on West Germany.

Alix was on that list.

It was called Operation Blue Thread, and it involved the governments of Great Britain, France, and West Germany. In the event of a Soviet attack, the British ambassador to West Germany would give the code word "Aquila." Three aircraft with British military staff would evacuate each royal on the list with 100 pounds of baggage and one servant each. They'd be taken to Lyons, France (in case Britain was a target for nuclear attack).

Three aircraft would be sent to evacuate the royals, with 100 pounds of baggage and one servant each.

The one catch? West Germany asked that the evacuees not be told in advance. If one of them leaked the news to the press, it might make the Western powers look weak. The British argued that it would be impossible to round up all 38 people with only 4 hours' notice, especially

when many of them – including Alix – were elderly. In the end, Prince Philip tipped off his sisters, but it appears the rest of them were left in the dark.



TWO OF PRINCE PHILIP'S SISTERS: THEODORA (LEFT) AND MARGARITA (RIGHT), WITH THEIR AUNT, LADY LOUISE MOUNTBATTEN (CENTER). PRESS ASSOCIATION, PUBLIC DOMAIN VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS.

As we know, the Soviet Union never invaded West Germany. Operation Blue Thread is a historical what if, and it's unclear if Alix ever knew about it. But the plan emphasizes how close her family was to the British royal

family, even if the kingdom of Hanover had been gone from the map for almost a hundred years.

And now we've come to the end of Alix's story. She died on August 30, 1963 at Glücksburg Castle, eighteen years after her husband. The world she'd grown up in was gone – there were no Russian monarchs, no German monarchs, no Romanian monarchs, and no Italian monarchs. Her Hanoverian family had long ago lost their British titles.

But she was surrounded by her children, including the son who'd come home to her from Soviet captivity. After experiencing two world wars, having the simple joy of a loving family was the happiest ending anyone could want.



ALIX'S 70TH BIRTHDAY (1953). BACK ROW: HEREDITARY GRAND DUCHESS KARIN, DUCHESS THYRA AND PRINCESS ANASTASIA. MIDDLE ROW: HEREDITARY GRAND DUKE FRIEDRICH FRANZ, GRAND DUCHESS ALEXANDRA, PRINCE FRIEDRICH FERDINAND OF SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN (HUSBAND OF ANASTASIA). FRONT ROW: PRINCESSES ELISABETH, IRENE AND MARGARETHE OF SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN. MARLENE EILERS KOENIG COLLECTION, USED WITH PERMISSION.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THIS TIARA?

LET'S BACK UP JUST a little bit to try and trace its history. Alix wore it a couple times in the 1930s, including to King Christian X's Silver Jubilee in 1936.

But it doesn't look like she was seen in a tiara after World War II. Does that mean all of hers had been looted from Glücksburg? Or that they were hidden in or near

Ludwigslust, still waiting to be retrieved? Or that she simply didn't attend any events where a tiara would have been required? I wish I could tell you.

Because this tiara survived intact, we know it wasn't looted and it probably wasn't hidden at Ludwigslust, in the Soviet-controlled sector of Germany.

We know that Alix's daughter Anastasia was seen wearing this tiara at least once.

Alix could have given this tiara to her daughter as a wedding present when she got married in 1943. If so, did Anastasia have it with her at Glücksburg? It must have been hidden pretty well if that was the case. It might also have been hidden at Schloss Kunzendorf or somewhere else entirely. Or she might have inherited it after her mother's death – in which case, Alix must have been the one who hid it well. If you have any information on this part of the story and the tiara's whereabouts during World War II, please contact me through my website!

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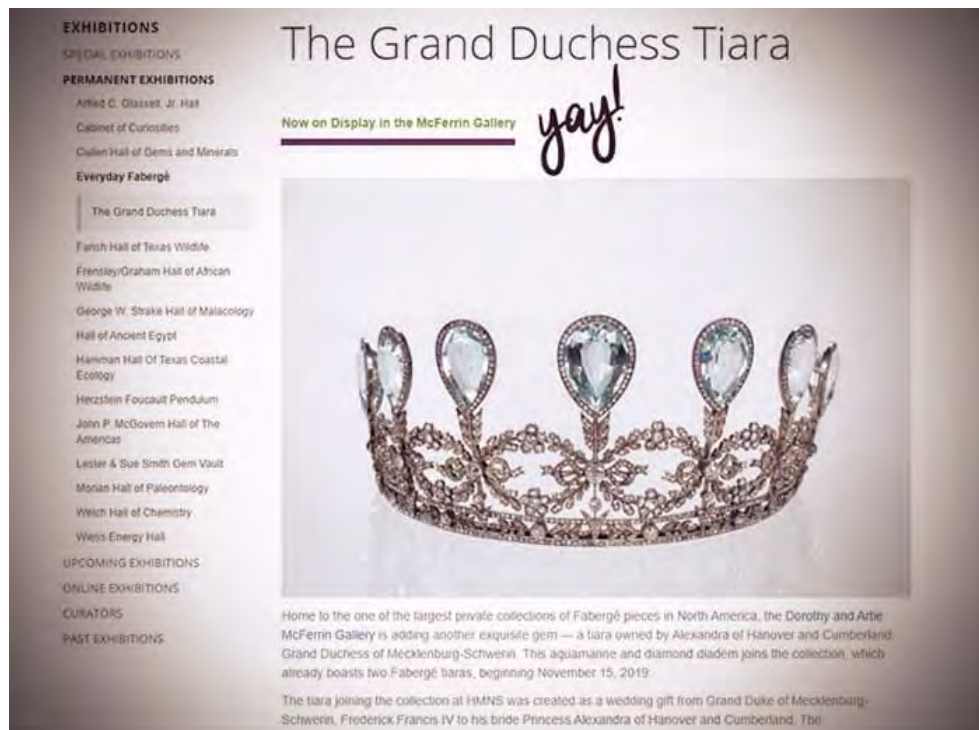
Alix's daughter Anastasia died in 1979, leaving behind four daughters, all of whom are still alive as of this recording in June of 2021. None have been seen in the tiara that I know of.

Her eldest daughter, Elisabeth, is very active as a family representative – but in 2019, at the age of 74, she handed over the management of the family archive. Is it a coincidence that the tiara went up for auction in the same year? My guess is that it's not.

While we don't know who officially made the decision to sell it, my guess is it was Elisabeth – maybe with input from her two sons. Both of those sons married in 2010, and neither of their brides appeared in this tiara.

At the 2019 auction, the tiara sold for CHF \$1,035,000.

The buyers were Dorothy and Artie McFerrin, notable philanthropists and Fabergé collectors. Today, the tiara is on display at the Dorothy and Artie McFerrin Gallery in the Houston Museum of Natural Science.



**SCREENSHOT OF THE MUSEUM'S WEB PAGE
FOR "THE GRAND DUCHESS TIARA."
I NEED TO GET MY BUTT TO HOUSTON.**

And that's what I call a happy ending for a tiara – it's still cherished and loved, but now we all have a chance to see it and be touched by its beauty, both as a work of art and what it represents as a symbol of Alix's life.

The End

A huge thank-you to Marlene Eilers Koenig for letting me use images of Alix and her family from the Marlene Eilers Koenig collection. And an equally huge thank-you to everyone who reached out to help with translations and pronunciations. I appreciate it so very much!

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- The People

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- [Alexandra of Mecklenburg-Schwerin's Tiara: Part One](#)
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