

## Villa Winter - Fuerteventura's Dark WW2 Secret

Written by Andy Owen



Villa Winter isn't exactly easy to reach these days.

In 1937, it was almost impossible.

Back then, the island of Fuerteventura was only sparsely populated, with just a handful of very small fishing villages and little or no infrastructure.

Villa Winter was built in a totally remote location down on the western coast, a place called Cofete on the Jandia peninsula. It was 20 kilometres from the nearest village - and there were no paved roads to it.

It was - and still is - a very lonely place.



But, of course, that was the whole idea.

Villa Winter was built in 1937. The Spanish government says it was built in 1946. But as you will read later, this suits their story, but ignores the truth.

The Villa was built by a very interesting character, called Gustav Winter.



He was born in 1893, close to Freiburg in the Black Forest.

He studied as an engineer - and, during World War 1, he lived in many countries, including Argentina and England.

In early 1915, Gustav Winter left England and went to live in Spain, where he completed his technical training and became a qualified engineer.

Immediately, he began working on a range of projects. In 1928, he built a power plant on Las Palmas - in an incredibly short time - and it was considered to be a masterpiece of German engineering.

Whilst on Gran Canaria, he took the opportunity to visit the islands of Lanzarote and Fuerteventura - and was particularly attracted by the wild, remote nature and beauty of the Jandía peninsula.

It was, as you will see, *exactly* what he - and others - were looking for. Winter had strong links to the Nazi party in the early days and there seems little doubt that prior to - and during - the Second World War, he was a fully-fledged German agent.

In 1936, he concocted a cover story that he wanted to industrialise the Jandia peninsula, showing basic plans to build a cement factory and a fish factory. He was quickly able to obtain a lease for the entire peninsula.

But the projects never happened. They were just a convenient front for something much more important.

As a Nazi agent, he had a plan. Whether it was his plan, or something agreed in Berlin that he was to control, we'll probably never know.

That's all been lost in the mists of time.

But, significantly, in that same year, he travelled to Berlin. Rumour has it, that he returned to the Canary Islands with 'suitcases of cash' given to him by Hermann Göring.

The Nazis had plans for the Canaries. They offered great strategic value.

And, because of the massive military help Hitler had given Franco in the Spanish Civil War, Franco owed Hitler. Big time.

So, in 1939, an agreement was reached between Franco and Hitler to turn Jandia Peninsular into a secretive military zone.



And Gustav Winter was right there to make that happen.



Workers were his first priority. He was given access to political prisoners from Franco's concentration camps, which had been set up by Paul Winzer the Head of the Gestapo in Spain.

He supplemented these with some locals from Fuerteventura. And those locals had told people that 'military men' were present and involved in the building work. The work began on Villa Winter in 1936. The first part was constructing a very basic road from Morro Jable to Cofete.



When work commenced on the Villa itself, workers noticed that the site was always heavily guarded. They were brought in every morning and forbidden to be in the area on the evening.

Parts of a railway track have also been found within the villa grounds. An old rail vehicle, heavily eroded now, stands in the villa's courtyard.

The vehicle was made by the Krupp company, who were the premier weapons manufacturer for Germany in both World Wars.

Additional railway items have been found about 200 metres to the east of the villa on a route that leads to the mountain.

This all suggests that significant mining activity took place there.

The location of Villa Winter is truly extraordinary.

It is said to have been built over an extended, volcanic cave system, with a potential connection to the sea.

Locals had reported regular blasting taking place in the subterranean caves and told of jetties being built. Apparently, very little, if any, exploration has been undertaken in these caves. Very strange, if true.

The Villa is basically positioned on what resembles a lunar landscape with a backdrop of Pico de Zarza, Fuerteventura's highest mountain.

Remote isn't the word. It is effectively cut off from the world.  
Exactly as it was planned to be.



It took just under a year to build and was finished in 1937.



83 years on, it's still a stunning place, even in its extremely run-down state. When just built, it must have looked majestic.



The effort and skill needed to construct Villa Winter is still obvious to see to this day. It is a remarkable building, with large, round arches, beautifully devised wooden balustrades and a striking castle-like turret that faces northeast.

There are two floors partly built into the slope and many, many unique aspects of the interior, which I will outline later. It has a spacious courtyard, a helipad - and other rather strange elements.

But, the question remains to this day - what was it built for?

Pedro Fumero, a local of the island, keeps his eye on the place, but has no doubt about its reason for existence.

Mr Fumero said: "I am sure Gustav Winter was provisioning German submarines."

After researching this story quite heavily, I personally think that was only part of it.

His grandfather and another relative were part of the original workforce that built the villa and he told Pedro many stories that have added to the mystique and speculation about Villa Winter.

He told Pedro he regularly saw German soldiers on the site. He also saw U-Boats in the ocean just off Cofete beach.

Many other local fishermen confirmed this.

And, stories of planes coming and going, were common.

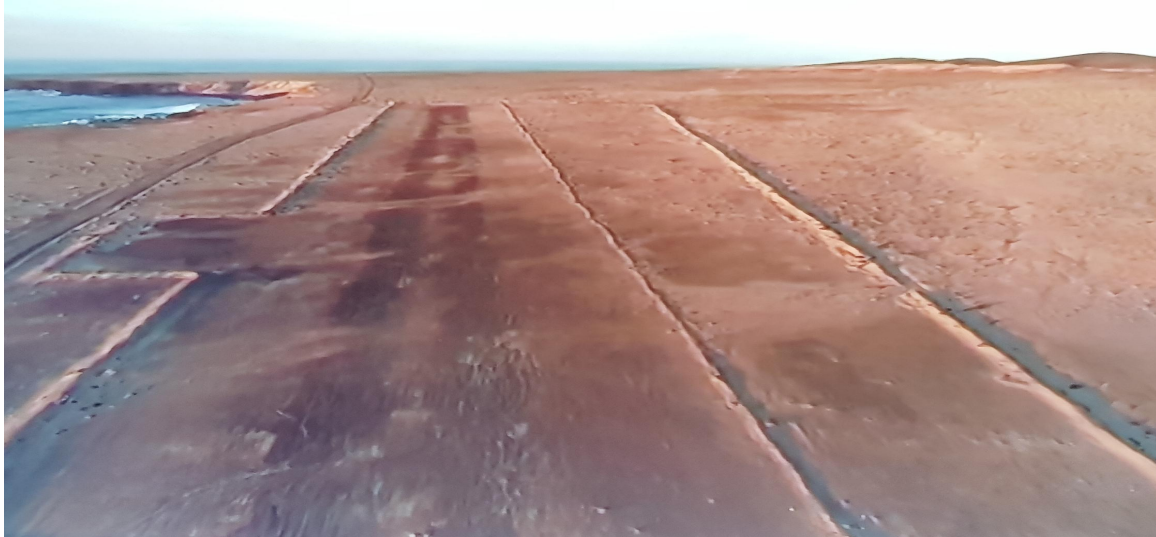
Down the road a little way, there is an old cemetery. It was reported that, at the time, there were graves in there with German names. These mysteriously disappeared.



The question I keep asking myself is - what reason would the locals have, to lie about stuff like this?

Another amazing element of Villa Winter, is an airstrip that was built in front of the property. Yes, an airstrip!

The remains of this are still evident today - and the parallel lines of stones are visible in Google satellite pictures of the coast.



Juan Jose Diaz Benitez, a history lecturer at the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, who has researched the Villa Winter story, was told by one of Winter's sons, that the reason Winter built it, was, "because his wife had a difficult birth experience, so he decided that planes should get access."

Winter was clearly a very smart man. But his alibis were really dumb.

Especially that one.

Because, although the family's coat of arms is above the door, Winter never lived in the house. He lived in Morro Jable instead.

All this of course, just adds to the mysterious nature of Villa Winter.

And, let's face it - it's as mysterious as it gets.

But, that mystery gets cranked up ten-fold, when I show you what's going on inside the house.

It is, to all intents and purposes, a military bunker.

It is so similar in its construction to so many German bunkers built in WW2, by the Todt organisation.

The walls inside the villa are military grade and six feet thick.

A normal villa like this would have walls just 10 inches thick. The corridors have reinforced walls and are built with arched ceilings.



These are so similar to other bunkers I have seen built by the Nazis in WW2, that were constructed like that to counter shock wave impacts.

Military grade walls? Shock wave ceilings? All clearly reinforced. Why?

This was supposed to be a domestic villa.

There is an extensive basement that is tunnel-like which runs as long as the house itself. It has just one window.



It originally had a door at the end leading to somewhere else, but that has been bricked-up and sealed. The function of this corridor has never been explained.

When the wall is tapped, a distinct hollow sound is heard.

There is something behind there that someone did not want the world to see.



What could it be?

There are rooms without windows. In a family house, a few hundred yards from a beautiful beach and the ocean?

Really?

There's an extremely spooky room, with white tiled walls that was supposed to be a kitchen. But, it's anything but that.

To start with, Spanish villas of that time, would always have coloured tiles in the kitchen. It was an important room.

Where the family congregated.

Full of fun and love.

Not plain white. Like a hospital...



This room has a distinctly sterile feel to it.

There is a slab that has been described by a doctor friend of Pedro's, as an 'autopsy table' and an oven that heats to 700 degrees - when a domestic oven tops at 300.

There's also a drain in the centre of the room.



A drain? In a domestic kitchen? On the floor?

Why?

And, there's no apparent place for a cooker. What went on in there?

OK. I've left the best for last. Villa Winter's tower is the icing on the cake.



It's only accessible from the top two floors, specifically only on the middle floor.

And this floor contains something very strange indeed.

An unusually large industrial-type fuse box...



In a normal family villa? Why?

This would be totally unnecessary for a domestic villa. And it would have been downstairs anyway.

There can only be one possible explanation. Whatever was going on in this tower, needed equipment with an extremely high power requirement.

What could that have been?

Actually, I think it's pretty obvious. And local stories confirm my suspicions.

It was claimed that the tower was, in fact, a lighthouse to signal Nazi U-boats. The position of the tower was perfect to send signals out to sea, to the waiting craft.

And the lighting power that would have been required, would have been significant.

But, there's more...

Pedro is convinced there is an excavated area underneath the house. He feels it is about 3 metres down. I have seen a video of him testing the floor with an iron bar and there is, once again, a clear hollow sound. There's something down there, no question.

But what? And why is it there?

All these questions could be answered by letting experts into the house with the right equipment. But the Spanish Government has continually refused.

Why? What are they afraid of?

You may have already decided on your answer to that question, but, if you still have some doubt, read on a bit more and then make your own mind up.



Officially Spain was neutral in the Second World War. But, that was a total sham - especially in the first three years of the war - and it was exposed on many, many occasions.

German U-boats were seen in Las Palmas regularly, as well as at Cadiz, El Ferro and Vigo on the mainland.



And, to give the necessary support to the Kriegsmarine's effectiveness in the area, German merchant vessels were allowed to be stationed as supply ships in those locations, offering key services, including refuelling.

The Spanish gave that permission. Because they had no choice.

There is little doubt that all of this - and more - took place in and around the Canary Islands and the southern coast of Spain. Allied intelligence were fully aware of it.

After the war in 1947, the Madrid bureau chief of the United States' Office of Strategic Services - a precursor to the CIA - described Mr Winter as a "German agent in the Canary Islands, who was in charge of observation posts equipped with wireless telegraphy and responsible for the supply of German U-boats."

Nazi documents have exposed a letter from Luftwaffe chief Hermann Goering, which states "that it was rumoured in the Canaries that one Gustav Winter was supplying fuel to German submarines, and that this was attracting the attention of enemy spies."

There seems little doubt that Winter was helping with the Nazi war effort. That's why the Villa was commissioned, funded and built.

And everything points to the fact that the Spanish knew this. But they turned a convenient blind eye to it. They simply had no other option.

It is now historical fact, that they owed Hitler a great deal. And this was clearly part of the payoff.

That's one of the reasons they claim Villa Winter was built after the war. Which it certainly wasn't.

They were trying to distance themselves from it - and what went on there.

Any excavation at Villa Winter, could well uncover some incredibly embarrassing things. And, they certainly don't want that...

A writer - Alberto Vázquez-Figueroa—said this:

'Nobody would think to build a mansion like that in such a remote place.

If today you risk your life to get there, in the forties it must have been much more dangerous. They must have needed to hide something really important in order to build that monster in a completely inaccessible area'.

All things point to the fact that Villa Winter was a logistics support point for German airplanes and submarines during the Second World War.

I think also, that it was probably used as part of the 'Rat Line', for high-ranking Nazi figures and sympathisers, to escape to South America after the war.

It was ideal. Out of the way, out of sight.

And, a perfect location to transfer to a sub, for the long journey to South America. We know that thousands made it down there after the war.

In a 2012 article in the Daily Mail, German prosecutors who examined secret files from Brazil and Chile, discovered that as many as 9,000 Nazi officers and collaborators from other countries, escaped from Europe to find sanctuary in South American countries.

Brazil took in between 1,500 and 2,000 Nazi war criminals. Between 500 and 1,000 settled in Chile. However, by far the largest number - reported to be as many as 5,000 -relocated to Argentina.



Makes you wonder how many of them might have used Villa Winter, doesn't it?

These are only theories and personal opinions, of course. But, they are well shared. And they make perfect sense.

Some people go further. There are also some who go as far as claiming that the 'medical' flavour of the kitchen, exposes its real purpose - and it was, in fact, a place where plastic surgery took place, when the war was lost, to disguise certain famous faces that passed through on the way to a new life.

Bormann? Hitler? Eva Braun? We'll never know, as those ghosts have pretty much disappeared now.

One thing we do know though, is that Gustav Winter was not only hugely talented, but a very mysterious guy, worthy of further research.

He was on the list of suspected Nazis whom the Allies had wanted to question and put on trial after the war. But, despite a number of requests, he was not handed over by the Spanish authorities.

They remained unhelpful to the end. Skeletons and cupboards come to mind.

Winter died in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria in 1971, aged 78.

I suspect a lot of the secrets of Villa Winter will have died with him. But, of course, if the Spanish relax their stance on future in-depth investigations on the property, there's a great chance that this could reveal some very interesting things.

But, that's the exact reason it won't happen.

I'll leave the last word about Villa Winter, to Pedro Fumero.

"I am sure Gustav Winter was provisioning German submarines," he said, using a mixture of wartime reports and his own personal findings - including a battery he claims is from a U-boat and that he found in the property.

"Why would you build a tower like this on top of what is essentially a military bunker? This was never a house meant for enjoyment," he says.

He is, of course, completely correct.

