

R E S T R I C T E D

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GERMAN AIR FORCE POLICY
DURING THE 2ND WORLD WAR -
COMMENTS BY GENERAL DER FLIEGER KARL KOLLER
ON A REVIEW BY
OBERST BERND VON BRAUCHITSCH *

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R E S T R I C T E D

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R E S T R I C T E D

GERMAN AIR FORCE POLICY DURING THE 2ND WORLD WAR -

COMMENTS BY GENERAL DER FLIEGER KARL KOLLER

ON A REVIEW BY OBERST BERND VON BRAUCHITSCH

I. 1939 and 1940

1. It would be more correct to say: "concentrated in one independent branch of the armed forces".
2. More correctly: "operational force".
3. The traditionally disdainful attitude of the Commander-in-Chief and his staff towards the Luftwaffe Signals personnel may be seen here: "The performance of the Air Signals corps greatly exceeded expectations and in certain activities, such as wiring and radio interception (not forgetting work with wireless and teleprinter links), it achieved really splendid results."
4. Here he probably means the permanent installations of the Post Office network. It was not the business of Air Signals to repair these, but they did help to do so. It was indeed an understood thing in communications work that the heads of the Army, Navy and Air Force Signals sections should work in close co-operation with the Post Office authorities. Even towards the end of operations, the Air Signals corps and its leaders acquitted themselves remarkable well; they were masters in the art of improvisation.

Although telephonic communications become more and more difficult for subordinate members of staff because of a decrease in the number of links available and although telephone connections between units at the lower levels were often severely restricted and occasionally failed altogether, yet I cannot remember a single occasion - until our enemies advanced east of the Rhine and west of the Oder - when I did not quickly obtain my connection with command headquarters and with units down to divisional level and below, despite the fearful destruction wrought by enemy air raids. With few exceptions, audibility was excellent, even over great distances. It was possible to speak from Paris to airfields near Poltava and outside Leningrad as if one were speaking to someone in the next room.

After our enemies had crossed the Rhine and the Oder, breakdowns occurred through the sudden shifting of units and because exchanges, repeater stations and cable links were captured by the enemy. Yet even under these conditions, communications were successfully restored time after time. Right up to April, 19th and 20th, when Germany was almost completely split in two, it was possible to speak on the telephone from G.H.Q. Kurfürst to anywhere in Southern Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia. When the country really was split, conversations were still transmitted from Kurfürst to Southern Germany and Czechoslovakia over the link, until the important exchange south of Berlin was seized by the Russians. This put the Air Signals corps out of action.

5. The elimination of the enemy force and of the senior command headquarters.
6. These were completely in the background at this time. Apart from

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R E S T R I C T E D

R E S T R I C T E D

- 2 -

a few Gruppen on the North German coast, there were no fighter formations engaged in home defence so far as I know; at any rate they were all put into the front line during the campaign in France.

7. "With an effectiveness which decided the outcome of the campaign".

8. Unfortunately. This showed a complete misunderstanding of this useful weapon, of the value of the highly qualified personnel involved and of the fact that there was not enough ammunition for a long war. This initial attitude produced disastrous results later and it was wrong at the time. As far as I remember, the western front had only two Fighter Geschwader at its disposal, which meant that the Luftwaffe in the West and all the defended objectives on home territory were quite inadequately protected.

9. What does Command mean here? The Supreme Command of the Armed Forces? The Fuehrer?

These men did not recognise - or did not wish to recognise - the significance of events, otherwise they would have acted differently. Thus a propaganda scheme was started in which the brave infantry, the supreme arm of the forces, was praised to the skies. In this connection the observations of some Army officers on the quality of the infantry in the First World War" and another colonel observed:- "The infantry only advances to attack when it has tanks ahead of it, artillery behind it and air support overhead."

10. Von Brauchitsch forgets that the entire organisation of the ground staff in the West still had to be planned. Not until at least a few of the railway lines were in working order again was it possible to bring up supplies of fuel and bombs. Signals communications and aircraft safety services had to be set up too.

I do not consider that the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces, the Fuehrer or any of the higher commands were prepared for the situation which developed after the campaign in France. During the early stages of preparation for the western campaign, the Atlantic coast was thought of as being the objective. This opinion was modified as the time for attack grew nearer and the Seine was considered an objective instead. Finally the opinion was held - and I think people in the very highest positions shared it - that it would be a great and gratifying success if the Somme - Marne area could be reached. The overwhelming successes which in fact followed came as a surprise.

11. The idea here was to divert British fighters to the protection of ground installations and industries in the South, thus leaving the skies clear in other areas. It was impossible to put into effect any theory about concentrated attacks at key points because of the spasmodic choice of targets which Hitler and Goering favoured.

The only valuable and vital targets were ports, dockyards and ships; Britain's life blood depended on these. Any bomb which fell elsewhere was wasted. The tactical group in Luftflotte 3 always supported this idea and the Commander-in-Chief finally adopted it himself, but Luftflotte 3 laid itself open to continual differences of opinion and friction with Goering and Hitler through its adherence to this plan and it was consequently criticised and found fault with for years.

12. Hitler, Goering and other leaders always held the view during the

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R E S T R I C T E D

R E S T R I C T E D

- 3 -

rearmament period that aircraft which could fly as fast as this did not need any defensive weapons. They thought they would only be a hindrance and reduce speed. The aircrews themselves and certain sensible, clear-thinking leaders and general staff officers wanted strong defensive weapons.

The opposition from above meant that German bombers, reconnaissance aircraft and dive-bombers were equipped with poor and thoroughly inadequate arms. War was waged for years against those in power in the department of the Director General of Air Force Equipment in an effort to obtain stronger weapons of defence. Our aircraft were constructed with an eye to speed, climbing power and flying performance; the fuselage was thin and narrow; everything had to be sacrificed in the effort to obtain the maximum performance from the motor power available.

Later on, larger crews were needed as well as arms and it was found possible to squeeze in extra men and to mount weapons without making any radical alterations to the design of the aircraft. Thus it came about that men dressed in flying kit had great difficulty in reaching their seats, even if they were slimly built. They could not stir a limb during long flights and became set and numb. Because of this lack of space inside the aircraft, German bombers were badly equipped with defensive weapons, sometimes almost laughably so.

13. The Supreme Command of the Luftwaffe did not reach this conclusion until later. While Luftflotte 2 was still carrying on its regular day-time attacks, Luftflotte 3 gave its Geschwader refresher courses in night flying and it began its night attacks on the port of London. This took place on the orders of Field Marshal Sperrle, who, with an eye to the future, considered that the losses involved in day-time operations would be crippling and out of all proportion to the successes gained and thought that night operations were the only possible tactics for our modest Heinkel 111 and Junkers 88 aircraft to undertake. The first night operations took the Commander-in-Chief of Luftflotte completely by surprise. Goering and Jeschonnek asked some remarkable and angry questions on the telephone. Private discussions and the rising losses in Luftflotte 2 finally convinced the Supreme Command of the Luftwaffe of the necessity of night operations.

14. Organised day-time attacks in bad weather were not carried out until much later. They were ordered by the Supreme Command of the Luftwaffe as a result of suggestions made by individuals, specially favoured officers in command of bomber units. The Luftflotte thought them pointless and this was proved to be true in actual practice. All that happened was that personnel and materials were wasted. Weather conditions change so rapidly in Britain that it is a mistake to rely on bad weather belts as protective cover for out-of-date aircraft.

Bad weather flights using high frequency equipment were not yet a feature during the attacks on Britain in 1940 and early in 1941. High frequency equipment began to make its influence felt in the spring of 1941 and became increasingly important from that time onwards.

15. The transfer of aircraft to the Italians (because of their commitments in Albania and Africa) cannot, in my view, be reckoned as a decisive factor. As far as I know, no transfers of this kind took place in the summer or autumn of 1940, nor during the spring of 1941. If there were any transfers during this latter period, then they were on a small scale. At all events I cannot remember Luftflotte 3 giving up any of its strength.

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R E S T R I C T E D

G.38525/BC/3/56/

R E S T R I C T E D

- 4 -

Day-time attacks were stopped because losses were becoming too heavy. Large-scale night attacks were suspended in December, 1940 or January, 1941 because of winter weather conditions and fog, which frequently meant delayed starting times, difficulties in finding the target and difficulties in landing back at base.

When orders were given to withdraw all units earmarked for operations in Russia, these attacks were almost completely suspended. The idea was for all these units to be overhauled (in respect of both crews and equipment) and for training to be completed by April. As far as I remember, the original plan was to start operations in the East at the beginning of May.

All the units which were intended for Russia were not available for a concentrated attack until shortly before they were transferred. The purpose was "to pretend that there was to be a revival of the German air war against Britain, to direct the attention of the world once more on to Britain and thus to screen the sudden transfer of the bulk of the Luftwaffe to the East."

It was only the Fuehrer's decision to attack Russia and his orders that the bulk of the Luftwaffe should operate in the East which stopped further large-scale bombing attacks on Britain.

16. Summer, 1940

We failed to clear the skies of British aircraft for the following reasons:-

- (a) We had not enough bombers or fighters.
- (b) Because of the high level of operational keenness, deserving of admiration, which was shown by the remainder of the British fighter force, our losses in men and materials increased and could not be made good, owing to the lack of reserves. Thus our fighting power diminished and the enemy's prospects improved as our day-time attacks continued.
- (c) German fighters had not had enough training in working in co-operation with other types of aircraft. They worked magnificently on their own, but at first they seemed to consider it almost an insult when they were expected to escort bombers. When they did engage in this kind of task, however, they did the best that they could within their technical limitations and fought with exemplary bravery even when conditions were most unfavourable.
- (d) Our bombers did not keep strictly enough to their flying formations, thus making our own fighters' task more difficult and that of the enemy fighters easier.
- (e) The Dornier 17 and the Heinkel 111 bombers, which were just adequate for operations during the campaigns of 1939 and 1940, were unsuitable and out-of-date when it came to waging an air war against an enemy whose defences were growing stronger. Many of these aircraft dated back to 1933, 1934 or even earlier and should have been replaced by newer types of aircraft. The Junkers 88 just fulfilled requirements in the summer of 1940, although I think it should have been replaced by a superior aircraft in that year. When this machine was introduced it showed such a small advantage over previous models and over modern fighters that it was obvious it could not hold its own in the air for long.

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R E S T R I C T E D

G.38525/BC/3/56/

R E S T R I C T E D

- 5 -

(f) The inferior quality of the defensive weapons carried by the Bombers (particularly in the rear) increased our losses and gave enemy fighters many successes.

(g) German fighters could not stay up for anything like long enough.

After the change-over to night attacks we failed to defeat the British because of:

(a) Inconsistencies at the highest German levels regarding the conduct of the air war and in the choice of targets. There was no proper centralised control.

(b) A lack of patience and tenacity in pursuing the war against Britain. The fighting in this area was interrupted and the bulk of the Luftwaffe turned its attention to the U.S.S.R.

To begin with, losses during night attacks were practically nil. We did not lose a single aircraft during the attack on Coventry. After that losses remained tolerable, but they increased from the spring of 1941 onwards and later, during attacks by numerically small forces, they became heavy.

If every effort had been concentrated on strengthening our operational forces, on improving aircraft types, improving navigation and bomb sights, if more effort had been made to combat British night fighters (which were constantly improving) and if the whole Luftwaffe had been left to attack Britain, then I have no doubt that through Germany's efforts - and she would have been capable of them - Britain would have suffered the same fate which Germany ultimately had to endure beneath the concentrated bombing attacks of the Western powers.

Signed: KOLLER

2nd August, 1945

The Luftwaffe before the Russian Campaign

17. This is in itself correct, but the question only arises here because the German Supreme Command, when organising air support for the Army, did not simply use close-support units like the Junkers 87 Stukas, but also put in Bomber formations which were really more suited for strategic employment. These formations had to perform various tasks (dropping bombs ahead of the infantry etc.) which could better have been left to the artillery.

18. True. Despite superhuman efforts, a powerful, top-grade Air Force could not be created out of nothing over a period of five years. What was achieved in this time was probably the best that was humanly possible.

The official emphasis was always on quantity rather than quality. In this preoccupation with figures it was considered essential that the numbers of formations should increase. This brought with it a decrease in efficiency and there were no reserves of either men or equipment. The same was true of the Army. Apart from the year 1940, Hitler carried out every operation - practically every battle - without reserves. The case of Moscow in 1941 is one of many such examples.

R E S T R I C T E D

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R E S T R I C T E D

- 6 -

It is impossible to go to war with incomplete armed forces unless everything is staked in a gamble, which was in fact what happened. I believe there is a passage in the old Field Service Regulations of 1890 and 1904 which reads as follows:- "Only with reserves is it possible to wage a victorious war." Such fundamental axioms of military conduct as these did not, however, hold good for the Fuehrer of the Third Reich.

19. The bomb sights were too complicated; something simpler and more accurate for use at high altitudes was needed.

When assessing the value of the armament carried by our aircraft, there can be no doubt that bombers, reconnaissance aircraft and dive-bombers were miserably equipped with defensive weapons.

The rank and file of the Luftwaffe knew little as yet about the use of high frequencies, but as this method became better known, most of the men were eager to master the new technique.

Misunderstandings could certainly be traced to the Commander-in-Chief, the Director General of Air Force Equipment, to those quarters responsible for production and, above all, to the man who at that time had the last word in matters of this sort, Secretary of State Milch.

Certain people had no understanding of the Luftwaffe Signals all through the war and no grasp of the problems involved, nor had they sufficient knowledge to enable them to make the right decisions. They were constantly being pulled first this way and then that by the views of the armed forces on the one hand and those of the technicians on the other. They lacked either the ability or the courage to make timely decisions and to assume responsibility.

Here is an observation made by Milch as Director General of Air Force Equipment:- "It was a crime to have created the Air Signals corps; it should be disbanded. The Post Office can take over the whole job; they would certainly do it better."

This was not meant as a joke, but quite seriously, and Reichsmarschall Goering held much the same view. In fact he often acted as if he had made this pronouncement himself.

20. "Fighter aces" who had handled a joy-stick more or less successfully for a short time during the First World War and who had then busied themselves for the next 15 years with party politics, the cigar trade or with thinking about other quick and easy methods of making money; people who had led an easy life or people who had been occupied in flying activities pure and simple, but who had absolutely no knowledge of military or Air Force matters and who knew nothing about air combat or war in the air.

Their memories of the limited experience they had gained in the First World War (when they had not learnt to think in military terms beyond the scope of a junior officer in the Flying Corps) had become vague and they had forgotten to keep themselves up-to-date with military developments. These gentlemen were thus too placid in their views (with perhaps a few exceptions in the cases of men who had had a hard struggle to earn a living).

"Aces" like this were listened to and had influence with the Commander-in-Chief, although in certain cases their inefficiency was proverbial in the Luftwaffe. I shall mention no names;* they are too well known.

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*e.g. Udet, Loerzer

R E S T R I C T E D

- 7 -

There were other men, however, the quiet, modest airmen of the First World War who possessed military knowledge and sound common sense and who, out of loyalty to the branch of the services in which they had served, regularly devoted time to a quiet and conscientious study of the problems affecting the Air Force, but their opinions were smiled at and rejected. Men like these could not turn pretty phrases or coin epigrams - it was not in their nature to do so - and therefore they were relegated as soon as possible to unimportant positions.

A man who often acted as a special adviser to the Fuehrer was his pilot, Baur, who later became a Lieutenant General of the SS. He was a pilot in the First World War and served in a ground-attack unit. After the war he was a pilot in one of the Bavarian Police units and then in Lufthansa.

He was an experienced pilot, able to fly on instruments and in all weathers, but he knew nothing whatever about dive-bombers, fighters, bombers, arms or bombs, nor did he know anything about military organisation, leadership, air defence or battle tactics. Nevertheless he pretended to be in a position to judge all these matters when the Fuehrer asked his advice and, to the detriment of the Luftwaffe, he made many nonsensical suggestions which the Fuehrer unfortunately accepted as gospel truths.

Many was the time when the Fuehrer rejected our proposals, saying that Baur had had quite a different view about the matter and that he must be right. How often did the Fuehrer have thoroughly misguided ideas on certain points, so that we wondered who on earth could have suggested them to him, only to discover later through von Below* or one of the secretaries that Baur's influence had been at work again.

These conversations between the Fuehrer and Baur took place over tea or at meals or sometimes tete a tete - at any rate there were never many representatives of the Luftwaffe present. Baur caused us no end of annoyance with his feigned knowledge and he had, to some extent, a really detrimental effect on the conduct of the war in the air.

I am sorry to have to say this about someone who was a close friend of mine as far back as 1920 and 1921, but I have no choice if I am to tell the truth.

Baur was the man who told the Fuehrer in 1942 that he and several other Lufthansa pilots were prepared to carry out night attacks on London (using Junkers 52 aircraft) and that they would suffer hardly any casualties in the process. He said this because Luftflotte 3 refused to fly over inland areas in England. This was so because of increasing losses and in accordance with the Flotte's principles of giving preferences to raiding port installations and shipping. It was also more economical to attack targets on the coast. The Fuehrer, however, wanted attacks to be made on inland areas as reprisals for English night attacks on Germany. Our Luftwaffe officers and men in the West were accused of cowardice, whereas in fact they were obeying the dictates of sober reason. Baur encouraged this idea by talking about the willingness to attack with Junkers 52 aircraft at a time when our aircrews did not dare to do so in their machines. This was a safe proposition as far as he was concerned, for he knew that the Fuehrer would not allow him to fly personally. The damage had been done, however, and the Fuehrer believed Baur.

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*Oberst von Below, Luftwaffe
representative at Supreme
Command Headquarters.

R E S T R I C T E D

G.38525/BC/3/56/

RESTRICTED

- 8 -

We then suggested that a Junkers 52 Gruppe should be set up for the ex-Lufthansa pilots' use. The impression was given in higher command quarters that feverish preparations were being made. Goering issued some instructions in this connection to a pilot and engineer named Hucke, but the scheme was never carried out. They probably became scared of their own courage.

When we wanted to introduce the use of cartridge-case bases and impact fuses as the most promising method of improving our A.A. artillery, Saur and Buhle resisted the idea and Baur made a remark to the Fuehrer which caused us very great difficulties. Baur told the Fuehrer that the whole idea was nonsense and that the decisive thing was the effect on morale of the explosion of A.A. shells and said that his own crew would change course completely if they saw such shells bursting. This might have been true in the case of his out-of-date peacetime aircrew, who had not heard of single shot fired, but it was certainly not true of German or British and American wartime crews. He had no idea of the true significance of our views.

21. Demands were bound to be complex considering the tremendous scope involved. It is also natural that they should keep changing in view of the speed of modern warfare. Concepts and views developed quickly. Everything is changeable in war; what may be right to-day is wrong to-morrow. It is, however, incorrect to quote "deficient technical knowledge in the officers corps" as a cause of the failure of every armaments plan.

It was the business of the top-ranking Luftwaffe officers to sort out the multiplicity of ideas and suggestions, to make discriminating and far-seeing decisions and to see that they were carried out. It should have been their proud task and duty to lead, in the true sense of the word, by virtue of their comprehensive knowledge of the great issues involved.

The Commander-in-Chief failed to control his branch of the Services with the necessary perspicacity, however; nor did he see that the required technical standard was maintained. He did not present the Luftwaffe's viewpoints and problems sufficiently clearly to the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces, nor did he know how to get his way with the Fuehrer.

Later on we described this state of affairs by saying:- "He (Goering) lives more in fear of his lord and master than anyone else does." The Fuehrer reached the stage where he no longer believed a word Goering said because he had given him false information on so many occasions. The Reichsmarschall was generally all at sea.

This reached such a pitch that one day the Fuehrer told the Luftwaffe officers who often had to attend for conferences to grunt or cough in the background every time Goering started talking nonsense. Of course we didn't grunt or cough, but we were on tenterhooks when Goering began to speak.

It was almost always Goering's fault if verbal agreements and arrangements did not reach the decisive stage. He would confer with each individual as it suited him, but each conversation was isolated and did not link up with any other. He would confer with the Director General of Air Force Equipment, with the Secretary of State, or with a random choice of officers from top-ranking Generals to youthful unit commanders and all the time his concepts and ideas were far removed from reality and thoroughly immature. Usually nobody knew what had been discussed with the others and the Chief of Air Staff was nearly always the last person to hear what was afoot and then often only by chance.

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RESTRICTED

RESTRICTED

- 9 -

Goering was also influenced by the irresponsible suggestions of his immediate entourage.

If there was no close liaison between the Chief of Air Staff, the Director General of Air Force Equipment and the Secretary of State, this could be traced to the strained relations which existed between these men. Goering did nothing to remedy this state of discord; on the contrary, he furthered it and was responsible for it in the first place.

The chosen chain of command formed the basis for this and differences of opinion were then deliberately fostered. Goering played one man off against the other and when they told each other their opinions, he was highly delighted and made mocking remarks to other people who were present, laughing childishly the while. I and other people often gained the impression that he thought it desirable for a state of discord to exist between people working together at a high level, almost as if he were afraid that a solid phalanx of resistance might be built up against him if these men worked in an atmosphere of smooth co-operation.

Goering was swayed this way and that by dozens of conflicting opinions and could find no solid basis on which to work. He called together conferences at very short notice, to which far too many people were invited, and then the endless chatter would begin. These lengthy conferences alternated between the matter-of-fact voicing of opinions by experts, long speeches and frequent outbursts of rage from Goering and a large amount of meaningless chatter by certain individuals (Milch was particularly clever at saying precisely nothing), all this being accompanied by little nods from Goering. These sessions dragged on and on and often finished without any decisions being made. Goering was inclined to put off making decisions or to reach a compromise. He often made decisions later as a result of fireside chats or conversations at table with irresponsible people.

An appallingly low standard was usually evident in the conferences which Goering held and in the content of what he said himself. Those taking part often looked at one another in astonishment and eventually propped their heads on their hands as they asked themselves: "What were we really supposed to be discussing and what is the point of all this?"

These conferences were badly conducted and the subject matter was never arranged clearly. Goering himself kept jumping from one subject to another, talking for hours about something completely off the point, and this grew worse as the months went by. This is not just my own opinion, but the verdict reached by the senior officers of all three Services. I can still well remember the enraged remarks which these officers made.

Of course it is the Commander-in-Chief's right to speak to any man in his branch of the service and to get opinions from all sorts of sources, but he must at the same time be in the superior position of viewing everything objectively, of being able to think independently and to reach sober conclusions. This was, however, far from true in Goering's case. The best type of Commander-in-Chief needs to have one man in whom he can confide, someone who has prepared the ground and who is in a position to make concrete suggestions which will help the Commander-in-Chief to reach his decisions. This man should be the Chief of Air Staff. In Goering's case, however, the Chief of Air Staff was nothing more than a coolie who could be treated worse than anyone else, upon whom every manifestation of anger could be vented and who had to shoulder all the responsibility if Goering himself got into difficulties.

RESTRICTED

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R E S T R I C T E D

- 10 -

The only sort of Chief of Air Staff who was acceptable to Goering was a "yes man" who thought that every word the great Reichsmarschall uttered was a pearl of wisdom, or who at any rate gave Goering this impression, even if he did laugh at him behind his back. The Chief of Air Staff also had to be accepted by the Reichsmarschall's circle of close friends. If they did not like him, they made life unpleasant for him until he resigned.

Another particularly bad feature was the fact that Goering's administrative staff was made up of young officers from flying, A.A. and air signals units, who had only been serving for a few years and who had not had enough experience in military matters. They had had only a few weeks' training in General Staff work - or none at all - and their attitude was immature. They were shaped and moulded in an atmosphere of conceit and intrigue and they became swollen-headed. They were given General Staff rank without General Staff training and were rapidly promoted over the heads of their friends, which had a bad effect on them. These young people presumed to pass judgement on everyone, including the Commander-in-Chief and certain generals who were old enough to be their fathers and whose knowledge and experience of life and of military matters was infinitely greater than that of their young critics. Their effrontery made one's blood boil. This same attitude applied in technical and operational matters as well as in personal ones. The scathing criticism which Goering's "court circle" received from the active officers and men of Luftwaffe units is fairly well known.

There were other people who took advantage of their connections with this circle in that they made all kinds of suggestions - some feasible and some not - direct to Goering and generally displayed a good deal of self-importance. These suggestions were accepted, enthusiastically approved of and passed to the General Staff for action, when they often proved to be impracticable at first sight (or after a short examination).

When the General Staff proved conclusively that the suggestions were incompatible with the facts, this led to outbursts of rage by Goering and to a lengthy and violent defamation of the General Staff, which was accused of purposely destroying every "important scheme which the Reichsmarschall had personally devised."

Von Brauchitsch, who had grown more mature with the passage of years and who had "come out of his shell" considerably during the last six months, was well on the way to becoming a valuable member on the practical side of staff duties. In 1943 and 1944 General Korten was particularly anxious that Oberst von Brauchitsch should resign. Generaloberst Loerzer, who saw a future enemy in von Brauchitsch, probably had something to do with it too. Possible successors were chosen. Goering was not, however, told the true reasons as to why this resignation was recommended. The Reichsmarschall was told that the Director of the Luftwaffe Operations wished for the resignation, that he wanted the adjutant's staff to be reorganised and that he recommended a certain person for the position of Chief Adjutant.

The Director of Luftwaffe Operations was thunderstruck when he heard about this latter. Even if he had in fact agreed to some more satisfactory arrangement being reached, he would only have been consulted, for the initiative lay with General Korten alone. To give further details of this business would take us too far.

22. Before the war, several years elapsed between the time the first line was drawn on the draughtsman's plan of an aircraft and the moment when the finished machine rolled off the assembly line. In the case of motors there was a time-lag of from 4 to 5 years. These periods were

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R E S T R I C T E D

- 11 -

shortened later. If the aim had been to keep the Luftwaffe at its peak all the time, plans for new aircraft would have had to be drafted every year, whether in peace or in war. Aircraft which the Luftwaffe could have modernised in 1940, 1941 and 1942 must have commenced being developed at least as far back as 1937, 1938 and 1939. It seems, however, that the technicians went to sleep after they had planned the new Heinkel 111 and the Junkers 88 and failed to look ahead any farther.

Perhaps this was why everyone, with few exceptions, simply could not believe there was going to be a war. Then when war came and our first successes followed, optimistic party-members thought we should soon have our own way, that the war would not last long and that our arms were adequate. When France fell, instead of seeing to it that Germany forged ahead with development and production as hard as it possibly could, they thought the war was already won and that it could never be lost now.

Neither the Fuehrer nor Goering was capable of judging the military situation critically or logically, yet experienced soldiers were not consulted or else their views were rejected as being ridiculous.

23. There was a split, however. As far as I remember, the following formations were left in the West:- 3 Fighter Geschwader, 3 Bomber Geschwader, some miscellaneous groups which had been formed from previous sea-plane units, "Fliiegerfuehrer Atlantik" with its forces and the "X" and "Y" Groups. One Bomber Geschwader was moved when fighting started in the East. A further Bomber Geschwader and one Fighter Geschwader were also moved away later, so that the West had to manage for years with two Fighter Geschwader and for long periods with one Bomber Geschwader. Even though individual Geschwader and relief forces did arrive from time to time, they soon left the area for the East, the South (as did Kampfgeschwader 6) and the far North (for example: K.G.30). When aircraft were transferred to Italy later on, this led to a further split.

In accordance with operational orders, the air war against England was to be carried on continuously, although the available forces were so small. The targets chosen by the highest level alternated between ships, ports and industrial targets. Sometimes attention was switched to mine-laying or reprisal raids. An endless, grim struggle went on between the Luftwaffe Command in the West on the one hand and the Fuehrer and Goering (the latter only when he came under pressure from Hitler) on the other about what could be achieved with the weak forces available, about where to concentrate our attack and which targets to choose. The whole affair reads like a novel. The attitude of those in power was a savage one; they were bitterly angry because Luftflotte 3 had not yet destroyed Britain.

The Luftwaffe Command in the West had to take into account its weak forces and had to reckon with the fact that losses in men and materials often outweighed the supply and that a steady drop in effective fighting strength was thus inevitable. "The greatest possible measure of effectiveness had to be attained with very small forces, involving the smallest possible number of German casualties," - this was the principle on which the Luftwaffe Command in the West had to act. This was not in tune with the political or propaganda angle, which carried much weight in high quarters and which led to serious misunderstandings in the military field.

Raids were ordered by the highest level to be carried out on inland targets in Britain and then complaints were made about the losses involved. The Luftwaffe was reproved for not being sufficiently

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R E S T R I C T E D

G.38525/BC/3/56/

R E S T R I C T E D

- 12 -

prepared for action, but no more men or materials were supplied.

Instead the Luftwaffe was ordered to engage in fresh reprisal raids. Luftflotte 3 generally had an effective strength of only 50, 40 or 35 bombers, yet the Flotte and its aircrews were reprimanded for not having achieved good enough results.

24. Goering said something to Field Marshal Sperrle in Luftflotte 3 about 2,000,000 men who were to be released from the Army for duties with the Luftwaffe and in Luftwaffe industries.

25. This does not hold true. The only operations which can be considered strategic ones from the Air Force point of view were those carried out against British shipping in 1939 and 1940 and the two raids which Luftflotte 3 made on the big fuel depots in the port of Marseilles. All the other operations were flown in order to provide direct support for the Army and were strategic only from the point of view of the Army.

26. Throughout the war the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces and the Army G.H.Q. staff had no understanding of the Luftwaffe. The Navy's attitude was a more generous one, especially in connection with the support which the Luftwaffe gave to submarine warfare, but it did not have much sympathy with the Luftwaffe's operational problems.

Every serviceman's ideas and the speed at which he thinks are conditioned by the particular arm in which he serves and its mobility. Many examples and much evidence can be quoted in support of this statement. How can a person who knows nothing about air tactics or the technical aspect of the Air Force be expected to have any understanding of the problems of air warfare?

Every regular Luftwaffe officer who went on active service was better informed about Army organisation, its weapons and battle tactics than practically any Army general staff officer, no matter how high his rank, was similarly informed about the Luftwaffe. In the practical field nothing whatever was known about the Luftwaffe by the Army.

A Luftwaffe officer, particularly one who had had full military training, quickly acquired a broad outlook - I might almost say a "universal point of view" - which was unknown in the Army and even in the Navy. Of course a division or a corps with its many thousands of men, hundreds of heavy weapons and thousands of vehicles is a mighty affair, yet its leaders' conceptions do not usually go beyond the range of their immediate neighbours to the left or to the right. By contrast, however, their battle objectives seem insignificant to the airmen in a modern Luftflotte.

27. He may have supported this idea in theory, but in practice he did not carry out any such operation, apart from the operations against Britain. I admit that the campaigns were so short that there was no opportunity to wage a strategic air war against Poland, Holland, Belgium and France. This could not have made its effect felt in so short a time. It was a different situation from the one in which Britain and the U.S.A. found themselves in relation to Germany from 1941 to 1944.

III. Plan of Campaign

28. I can only emphasise this. Exactly the same thing happened with the assessment of the future American Air Force rearmament programme, with the figures quoted concerning enemy operations by day and by night, the distance to which enemy fighters had penetrated etc. Information

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R E S T R I C T E D

R E S T R I C T E D

- 13 -

which was quite conclusive and correct in every detail was just rejected because it was embarrassing. People who made these reports were insulted, called pessimists and made to look ridiculous. For example, when we had some very practical evidence concerning the depth to which American fighters were penetrating, our statements were flatly denied by the Commander-in-Chief.

29. Our two top leaders did not make and were incapable of making a sober, military assessment of the situation. Their assessment of the possibilities and relative strength on either side (taking into account the time available and the area in which the fighting was taking place) was amateurish in character. Decisions were made more by intuition and instinct than anything else.

30. At the same time it must be pointed out that intelligent leadership was lacking.

31. At first Hitler only wanted to wage war with Russia and had anticipated that the fighting would start at an earlier date. The war in the Balkans intervened against his will.

32. Hitler thought

(a) that he need fear no particular threat in the West during the year 1941.

(b) that he could completely overthrow Russia in this time and that all his forces would be quite free again at the end of 1941 to undertake fresh tasks.

33. The indispensable support which the Luftwaffe had given the Navy in the Atlantic and round the coast of Britain was forgotten. It is an open question whether this inter-Service link was simply not appreciated or whether it was purposely ignored, so that war could be waged with Russia.

34. I assume that these objections were not made forcefully enough. At all events Goering was always very disinclined to protest strongly to the Fuehrer about anything. If he did decide to do so, he often found that the other Commanders-in-Chief and the Chiefs of the Army and Armed Forces General Staffs left him in the lurch instead of helping him, as they should have done.

IV. The Russian Campaign - 1941

35. Very true. Germany was always haunted by a fear of Russia and the whole country felt enormously relieved when the 1939 agreement with the Russians became known. Now there was a sudden change of face which gave all right-thinking people in authority and the great bulk of the German nation a deep feeling of alarm.

36. It cannot be said that the Luftwaffe employed strategic bombing tactics; the exact opposite was the case. The writer has failed here to give a clear definition of the word "strategic".

37. In my opinion this has no connection with "strategic" bombing attacks.

38. One can only agree on this point. It is deeply regrettable that the Commander-in-Chief and the Chief of Air Staff allowed the power they might have wielded to be wrenched from their hands. Even in Russia

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R E S T R I C T E D

R E S T R I C T E D

- 14 -

itself strategic bombing operations were not carried out when we were on the threshold of the Russian armaments industry. We regretted this bitterly later when the thin German front line was no longer able to defend itself against the great weight of the Russians' material strength.

39. This was always so. When can the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces be said to have exercised a liberal and far-seeing leadership?

40. I deny this absolutely. It was not the Commander-in-Chief's duty to take the line of least resistance and to choose a cheap solution by means of a compromise in which all the usual faults were inherent.

Although other people's opinions differed from his, it was his job to decide and he had the chance here to show his qualities of leadership. A wrong decision is better than no decision at all. What actually happened was that no decision was made.

Recommendations made in the summer or autumn of 1941 concerning the production of new types of aircraft would not have made their effect felt in the front line until the end of 1943 at the earliest and probably not until 1944. I am now wondering what suggestions were made or what was decided about the production of new models in 1938, 1939 and 1940. With few exceptions, we did not see any results in this direction in 1940, 1941, 1942, 1943 or even 1944.

At the end of the year 1941 there were no new models in existence and so it was recommended that the manufacture of the old types - the Heinkel 111, Junkers 88, Junkers 87, Messerschmitt 110 etc. - should be continued.

The order of Hitler mentioned here was certainly given, but it must not be forgotten that a slowing up of production actually occurred as far back as the end of 1940 and the beginning of 1941. During the years 1938, 1939 and 1940 we failed to produce any four-engined bombers, jet aircraft or engines of 2,000 horse power or more. All this was bound to have serious consequences later. The Messerschmitt 262 jet, which was at the prototype stage in 1941, was particularly affected because the Reichsmarschall and the Technical Department at the Air Ministry were now of the opinion that this aircraft would not be ready for service within six months and that work on it must therefore be suspended in accordance with the Fuehrer's order. It was not until 1942 - under Milch - that energetic measures were resumed towards production.

41. Udet, who was surrounded by engineers and who had no close contact with the officers and men of the Luftwaffe, finally reached a stage where he lost his nerve and was no longer able to cope with his problems.* This was not his fault, but the fault of those who appointed him Director General of Air Force Equipment. Every regular officer who knew Udet from the old Flying Corps days knew that he would not be able to cope with this task; indeed I believe the whole Luftwaffe realised this. Udet, who was a splendid airman, well versed in technical matters and a delightful companion, was none the less unsuited and unprepared to undertake the great and difficult tasks of the Director General of Air Force Equipment and he was bound to come to grief.

The fact that he was given the post proves that our top-ranking leaders were either biased in their appointments or else poor judges of human nature.

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*He committed suicide on
17th November, 1941.

R E S T R I C T E D

R E S T R I C T E D

- 15 -

42. I think that it was principally Goering who supported Hitler.

The serious disagreements between Goering and responsible people at Army G.H.Q. in the Army itself and in Supreme Command H.Q. date from this period.

43. Absolutely right, but Goering was also to blame. He forced Jeschonnek into this position in the following ways:-

(a) he kept telling the Fuehrer that air support for the Army could be provided in all areas; indeed one feels tempted to say that he forced this suggestion upon Hitler

(b) he could not represent the interests of the Luftwaffe himself, as he was often away.

(c) he was responsible and not the Chief of Air Staff.

44. One can only thoroughly agree with this. This was the greatest mistake in organisation which the Fuehrer made and was injurious not only to the Luftwaffe where its consequences were seen at once, but also to the Army.

At this time the Eastern Front was under the command of the Chief of the Army General Staff and the other fronts were controlled by the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces, which had to refer humbly to Party H.Q. on all questions of dispositions of forces and the supply of arms and equipment. A man on active service expects to see his Commander-in-Chief from time to time and to be addressed by him periodically when orders are issued. There was no longer any real Commander-in-Chief, however, for the Fuehrer could not be considered as such.

Day to day command was relegated to planning staffs, who only acted on instructions, and a bureaucratic system of leadership came into being. There was also the fact that the Fuehrer was occupying himself at this time with all sorts of petty and insignificant details and I think he had lost his general grasp of affairs as a national leader. At the same time the way was now open for the Party to interfere more and more in policy with regard to personnel.

45. Likewise Goering, who declared it was all bluff. At this time he was still the trusty paladin of the Fuehrer and agreed unreservedly with Hitler's views on all important matters. The Fuehrer and Goering both expressed themselves in like manner, saying that the Americans might be very clever at manufacturing Fords, Chevrolets and refrigerators, but they were no good at turning out aircraft.

The Director of Luftwaffe operations and experts on American industry like William Werner tried in vain to correct this erroneous view. At the end of 1943 Goering considered that the arming of the American Air Force constituted a merely superficial show of strength. At this juncture he declared in all seriousness: "American reserves of manpower for aircrews are completely exhausted." Goering frequently repeated this, to General Korten and to the A.O. fighters amongst others. (As far as I know, America trained no less than 250,000 pilots in the last war.)

46. I well remember a personal discussion about the general situation which Field Marshal Sperrle and I had in Luxemburg at Christmas time in 1941 when we came to the conclusion that the war could no longer be won on strictly military lines.

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R E S T R I C T E D

G.38525/BC/3/56/

R E S T R I C T E D

- 16 -

V. 1942

47. I consider that these statements are untrue. It had already been seen in the West during the year 1941 that the British were doing what we did in 1940, that is to say they were carrying out day-time penetration raids with fighter cover - at all events they tried to do so, albeit on a modest scale, using Blenheims, Bostons and four-engined Stirlings. This made us think seriously about what the future might hold. Numerical strength was a decisive factor for attacker and defender alike. There were only two poorly equipped Fighter Geschwader in the West, however, and virtually no fighter defences in Germany itself.

As things were, the British could have penetrated into the Reich even if they had been using older types of aircraft with poor defensive armaments.

We had the details about the B.17 and B.24 aircraft which were on their way and we studied them carefully. The A.O. Fighters thought that enemy bomber operations without fighter escort would prove impracticable in the long run, but at the same time he pointed out the danger of the deep penetration powers which American escort fighters possessed.

Any such allusions to the future were explained away, however, by calling the people who gave these warnings "weak defeatists".

At the end of 1942 a ratio of four German fighters to every one Allied bomber was considered necessary in order to effectively prevent day-time penetration raids and it was also considered that we must have the same ratio of fighters to cover the biggest escort force which the enemy might send over. At all events this was the view held by the A.O. Fighters and we people in the West thought the same. I know that the A.O. Fighters presented these estimates to the Fuehrer.

48. That American escort fighters could penetrate to a considerable depth was not only considered a possibility at this time; it was in fact predicted that they would do so. It was known that these aircraft could carry more than 1,000 litres (about 225 gallons) in their inner tanks and there were, after all, a few people in Germany who could work out simple arithmetical sums. There were fierce arguments with Goering on this score and later the facts were flatly denied in the most ridiculous fashion. The stage of the war which von Brauchitsch has in mind, when deep penetration by enemy aircraft was thought to be impossible, was in fact earlier on; this view was held at the end of 1942, but nobody supported it later except for Goering and his circle.

49. Goering asserted that he had personally persuaded the Fuehrer not to go through with the plan for capturing Malta. The regrettable point about this was that he did so because he was afraid of losing his paratroops in the process.

50. According to my knowledge, this had been recognised long before, but it was nevertheless denied by the Supreme Command.

51. Every bit as much on the technical side. There was also the gloomy prospect of no immediate improvement being in sight.

52. No conclusions were drawn from this.

53. The Fuehrer and Goering, following in his wake, were highly dissatisfied with Luftflotte 3.

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R E S T R I C T E D

R E S T R I C T E D

- 17 -

This organisation clung fast to its old belief that the only important operations were those directed against ships, ports and dockyards and that bombs dropped on other targets inland in Britain were wasted. It accordingly directed its energies to mine-laying and to attacks on harbours and shipyards. Besides this it had to take into consideration the conservation of its weak striking force. Sometimes it had no more than 40 serviceable aircraft at its disposal. The supply of aircraft and personnel was practically nil and so common sense dictated that the Luftflotte could not launch costly attacks on the inland areas of Britain.

Announcements were made from day to day concerning the targets which were to be attacked. The Supreme Command often changed its mind about them and decreed that reprisal raids should be carried out on inland targets in Britain, reproaching the Luftflotte the while.

This did not, however, exclude the fact that even in Supreme Command circles the idea occasionally penetrated that the battle against supply routes on the sea - that is to say mine-laying and attacks on ships, port installations and dockyards - was of the most vital importance and that orders were given to carry out operations of this sort. The Supreme Command vacillated from one idea to another without any clear objective.

Shortly before the appointment of the O.C. Attacks on Britain³ (Angriffsfuehrer England) there was yet another development. Before this there had been a considerable amount of argument between the Luftflotte and the Commander-in-Chief of the Luftwaffe. Jeschonnek had told us how strongly the Fuehrer and Goering disapproved of us and how they accused the Flotte of cowardice, saying that it "did not dare to fly inland in Britain". The Flotte was blamed for not having destroyed Britain long ago and it was accordingly thought that it deserved to be punished and disbanded.

A revival of the war against Britain and the persistent carrying out of reprisal raids were expected to develop under the leadership of a man who was young and keen, but who was not sufficiently mature and not prepared for this task. He was a protege and his actual ability and the strength of his personality were grossly overrated. The Field Marshal (+) had his wings clipped. I predicted the fate of the new O.C. Attacks on Britain when he first took up his duties. After a little while his position was no better than that of Luftflotte 3; he was soon reproached in the same way, in fact even more harshly and severely.

The whole idea of an "O.C. Attacks on Britain" emanated from Goering's circle and from other ambitious advisers in the background. This man (≠) was recommended to the Fuehrer, who appointed him and gave him his orders, yet in personal matters and from an operational point of view, he came under the direct control of Goering and not of the Fuehrer. Oberst von Brauchitsch is mistaken here; this whole organisation was thoroughly mischievous from a military viewpoint. I expressed my opinions about it in detail when answering a questionnaire.

54. 1. I do not think that the General Staff expressed itself very clearly as regards its tactical and technical armament requirements at that time.

2. The numerical requirements, which had to be decided at least

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³Generalmajor PELTZ was appointed for this task in March, 1943.

(+) Feldmarschall Sperrle
(≠) Generalmajor Peltz

R E S T R I C T E D

G.38525/BC/3/56/

R E S T R I C T E D

- 18 -

8 months before they could be realised, were an insult in view of the way in which the war could be expected to develop.

3. Neither the Commander-in-Chief himself nor the young technical officers who advised him and the Chief of Air Staff had any real idea what quantity of materials the German armaments industry was in a position to turn out after its production methods had been to some extent modernised.

4. Now that a policy of careful economy had been introduced in production, the fear of a shortage of raw materials was beginning to loom up like an evil spectre.

5. The criticism was always being made that the Commander-in-Chief and the Director General of Air Force Equipment kept themselves jealously - and indeed childishly - aloof from the idea that the Armaments Department should control and plan the production of armaments, with the result that this organisation later carried out a bitter campaign about payments. It was often claimed that underhand financial dealings took place in this connection.

The statements which von Brauchitsch makes here are therefore not quite apposite, or perhaps I should say not comprehensive enough.

55. In this connection let me quote two observations made by General Galland and Field Marshal Milch respectively.

GALLAND: "This is a monstrous idea designed to shelve responsibility."

MILCH: "The Industrial Advisory Council worked splendidly. It was not responsible itself, but was subordinate to the Director General of Air Force Equipment."

56. Milch indicates this as the only possible compromise after the gap in production had become a fact in 1940 and 1941.

57. Messerschmitt 262s, Heinkel Turbos, Junkers 152s, Messerschmitt 309s, 2,000 H.P. fighters - but production of all of these was stopped with Goering's approval.

58. Rather was it the insufficient technical understanding possessed by Goering, his immediate circle and his advisers in the background. None of these people had had any training in this field.

The General Staff officers had, however, been trained for their own work and this gave them some grasp of technical matters too. It is worthy of note that here, as in so many cases, the blame is attached to the General Staff, whose suggestions usually went unheeded. Goering and his followers always claimed to know best.

59. It was only the people round Goering who looked at it from this viewpoint.

60. Whence would they be forthcoming in view of the system of planning which prevailed at our highest level of Command?

61. It was his own fault. He did not exercise his authority before and when he had no influence left, why did he not retire from the scene?

62. Perhaps Hitler would have interfered less if he had not had the feeling that Goering did not care deeply or seriously enough about

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R E S T R I C T E D

R E S T R I C T E D

- 19 -

his branch of the Services and that he was far too interested in a thousand and one other matters. When Goering rang up Headquarters, he was generally a long way off and indeed he frequently did not even bother to carry out his duties as a commander over the telephone.

Field Marshal Milch made a malicious observation which I will mention here, although I do not support it because it is not entirely true or defensible: "The Commander-in-Chief was ignorant and lazy, which meant that he was not with us as far as the work was concerned. Unfortunately, however, he was with us in the flesh."

VI. 1943

63. Goering is supposed to have assumed responsibility for this matter of Hitler, according to the Supreme Commands of the Navy and of the Armed Forces.

He ought never to have done so; for even a rough assessment of the situation must have shown him that our transport aircraft were not in a position to take 500 tons of supplies to Stalingrad every day for months on end, quite apart from the fact that if we lost our airfields - and we did - it would be impossible to carry out this task.

At a conference, however, Goering strongly challenged the assertions made by the Supreme Commands of the Army and of the Armed Forces that he had guaranteed supplies for Stalingrad.

64. Likewise all the transport and passenger aircraft from every theatre of war and almost all the training aircraft from the Director of Training.

65. Because Goering was hardly ever there. Hitler did not understand anything about the Luftwaffe. Goering did not know any too much about it either. He was more of a politician than a military leader and would have done better to remain in the realm of politics. He either did not consult or did not listen to officially appointed advisers, but allowed himself to be persuaded by irresponsible people instead.

66. Because insufficient counter-measures had been taken in the first place.

67. I know that this was already under way.

It seems important to me at this stage to glance back to the events of 1942, whereby some interesting light may be cast on the views held at that time by the Commander-in-Chief, the Chief of Air Staff and Major Storp, a technical officer whose opinions were not much respected then. We shall see what unconsidered and dangerously erroneous views were held as regards the number of aircraft required.

In Spring 1942 Milch outlined the first armaments plan in so far as it was then possible and by the end of 1942, he estimated the necessary production figures as being 1,000 fighters per month.

The Commander-in-Chief's reaction to this was to roar with laughter and to ask what anyone could possibly want with a vast number of aircraft like that. Jeschonnek observed in this connection:- "I cannot accommodate more than 400 to 500 fighters per month."

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R E S T R I C T E D

G.38525/BC/3/56/

RESTRICTED

- 20 -

At the same time there arose a violent quarrel between Galland and Major Storp, the technical officer. On the instructions of Jeschonnek, Storp asked Galland to make an estimate of the number of fighters required for a mammoth air force, that is to say for an air force which would cover the whole area which Germany controlled at that time in Europe (including the Balkans) and in North Africa.

Galland estimated that there should be an establishment of 4,000 to 5,000 fighters and that a similar number should be produced each month for the duration of the war. This pronouncement greatly astonished Storp and Jeschonnek, caused violent disputes with Storp and finally resulted in a mistaken rejection of the figures, which had been arrived at through expert calculation.

After lengthy and rather suspect discussions, Storp and Jeschonnek finally stated that the desirable figure for aircraft production was 700 per month, less in fact than the number the Director General of Air Force Equipment had estimated at the end of the year 1942.

This explains to some extent why we had too few aircraft in 1943 and 1944.

68. All quite correct, but what did the Commander-in-Chief of the Luftwaffe do about it? Anything? A very strong line should have been taken here.

69. In view of the lack of understanding which the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces had for the Luftwaffe (which was probably founded to some extent on a feeling of personal animosity towards Goering), a decision like this could only have been reached after the greatest of struggles and difficulties.

Goering did not dare to fight this life or death battle, he only skirmished, whereas a genuine and far-seeing Commander-in-Chief of the Luftwaffe would have felt duty bound to fight it with all his might. In this way he did much to damage relations between Hitler and the Luftwaffe.

70. Jeschonnek in his position midway between the Fuehrer and Goering was like corn being crushed between two grindstones. He finally lost his nerve when he could see plainly how things were going to develop. In view of the circumstances, Jeschonnek's position was one which no one could endure indefinitely. Perhaps the author will remember that after I had been Chief of Air Staff for two months I told him and Goering:- "Now I can quite understand how Generaloberst Jeschonnek felt. I shall feel just the same before long."

The author forgets to mention the fact that Goering's circle of intimate friends (amongst whom were numbered the author himself and Diesing) went to great pains to undermine the relationship between Jeschonnek and Goering and to bring about Jeschonnek's downfall. The plotting against Jeschonnek was such that all confidence was bound to be destroyed and Jeschonnek was certain to lose his grip on things. When I reproached Diesing about this, he confirmed that it was so and said:- "Yes, we have been acting like a gang of conspirators because we consider it necessary, but we should be glad to stop doing so if the need were no longer there."

Any comment would be superfluous.

71. Between the Chief of Air Staff, Goering and his circle. Korten's

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RESTRICTED

R E S T R I C T E D

- 21 -

relationship with Goering's circle was not a close one for long, although he did not let this become very widely known. Who knows what his purpose was in trying to effect changes in Goering's circle, the first of which was an attempt to remove Oberst von Brauchitsch from his position as Chief Adjutant and to find employment for him elsewhere? Korten really did try hard to do so.

72. Incorrect. The Luftwaffe Operations Staff made the plans and suggestions and its Director was the man primarily concerned. After Korton and Goering had been won over to this idea, the Luftwaffe Operations Staff pursued its long campaign, with Korten at its head, of course. Again and again, however, Korten had to be spurred on. To begin with he did not want to have anything to do with the business because he did not want to fall out with Hitler and because he thought it was hopeless to try to win over the Chief of Army Staff and the Fuehrer to the idea of withdrawing the bomber formations from continuous ground support work.

We succeeded in convincing and winning over Zeitzler, however, and then we brought every influence to bear on the Fuehrer through Zeitzler, Speer, Himmler, Hewel (the ambassador), Below and others. Models of the power stations supplying the Russian armaments industry made their appearance next, then I gave some occasional guidance and Christian did so too through his air situation reports, this being followed by official lectures by Goering, Korten and myself. Only in this way was it possible to convince the Fuehrer and to win him over in favour of the Luftwaffe being used strategically in the East. No large-scale operations could be launched unless Hitler agreed.

73. Preparations for these operations were not disturbed thus at that time, but about 8 - 10 days before the bomber formations were due to set off on their first long-distance operation, the Fuehrer decreed that the whole force should attack Russian railway supply routes in support of the German Army, which had once again almost reached breaking point under the weight of the Russian offensive. When the German Army had retreated, it had left almost all the railway lines, crossings and stations either intact or so ineffectively damaged that the Russians were able to get them back into working order again very quickly. Although the Fuehrer promised me that the attacks on the railways would only last for a few days and that they could be regarded as the last of the preparatory operations over enemy territory before the big offensive (which must at all events be launched according to plan), our bomber formations were never again freed from their Army support commitments.

The Fuehrer violently opposed the carrying out of the big offensive and abruptly rejected every proposition which was made in connection with it, even when he was reminded that he had given his consent earlier. This went on until all the territory on which suitable flying bases could have been set up for the proposed offensive were lost.

74. This is wrongly represented. The reason for appointing an "O.C. Attacks on Britain" was not a premeditated one with the idea of concentrating our forces in an all-out attack, but the creation of this appointment was quite spontaneous. How would it have been possible to make a concentrated attack anyway, in view of the fact that we had insufficient forces available?

The fact of the matter was that when the "O.C. Attacks on Britain" was appointed, he took over the tactical leadership of the existing formations in IX Fliegerkorps. Operationally he was subordinate to Goering. The formations came under the general command of IX Fliegerkorps in Luftflotte 3 as far as personnel administration and supplies were concerned.

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R E S T R I C T E D

G.38525/BC/3/56/

R E S T R I C T E D

- 22 -

Generalmajor Peltz was "O.C. Attacks on Britain" and A.O. Bombers at one and the same time. He was personally subordinate to Goering, but was responsible to the Chief of Air Staff as far as his work was concerned. All this is a classical example of the absurd way in which the Commander-in-Chief of the Luftwaffe and his circle organised things, where single individuals were encouraged to build their empires.

Peltz had a battle H.Q. in France, a command H.Q. at Rangsdorf and he had to go to Berlin once a week for an over-all situation conference. Besides this he generally had to pay a weekly visit to Goering, who was at Berchtesgaden, Nuremberg or Karinhall; he also had to go once a week to East Prussia to see the Chief of Air Staff and to Luftflotte 3 in Paris. Consequently Peltz was travelling all the time and did not undertake the command of either of his posts. Of necessity his staff subordinates took over the command and there were nothing like enough of them in the H.Q. of the A.O. Bombers. It was never possible to find anyone who was really responsible. Peltz got so used to travelling that he could never give it up.

The Luftwaffe Operations Staff was no longer able to co-operate with any unit H.Q.; the "O.C. Attacks on Britain" did not come up to expectations and the A.O. Bombers did not perform his functions during this whole period.

In a short memo. which I sent to the Chief of Air Staff and to Goering I asked that this ridiculous state of affairs be amended. I said that the office of "O.C. Attacks on Britain" must be eliminated, that a clearly defined chain of command must be re-established and that a thoroughly responsible A.O. Bombers must be appointed. General Korten supported my plea. Thus it came about that the situation was altered.

Peltz, who was well liked, was asked by Goering which he would rather be: A.O. Bombers or A.O.C. IX Fliegerkorps. He chose the latter.

The office of "O.C. Attacks on Britain" was done away with and Peltz was appointed A.O.C. IX Fliegerkorps, thus becoming subordinate to Luftflotte 3 once more. There were no changes in the flying units. Oberst Marienfeld was appointed A.O. Bombers.

75. This is also incorrect. It was not the intention to set up X.Korps as a separate entity. The A.O.C. X. Fliegerkorps in the Balkans and some of the people on his staff were merged with the existing "Fliegerführer Atlantik" and the name of X. Fliegerkorps was taken over at the same time. This was General Korten's wish on General Holle's behalf. There were no changes in the flying units. No fresh formations were added.

76. Milch's comment about this is:- "Absolute nonsense. The author has no idea".

77. "Very true." *

78. "Like Goering." *

VII. 1944

79. Nos. (1) and (3) cannot really be classed as important reasons.

No. (4) is correct, but not decisive.

/Although

*These are quotations of statements made by Milch.

R E S T R I C T E D

- 23 -

Although each of the points mentioned is important in itself, it is wrong to quote them all as being decisive factors. Much more decisive was the enemy's clear-cut choice of target and the co-operative way in which the air war was pursued. There was an uninterrupted sequence, with the USAAF carrying out day-time raids and the RAF bombing at night.

80. A new type of attack which could be carried out in all weathers and by night as well as by day.

81. These descriptions are not quite correct.

1. At the important April conference on the Obersalzberg, I know that the fighter production scheme which the Fighter Staff put forward was rejected. Instead orders were given for an increased drive in the production of the Heinkel 177 and Junkers 88 group of aircraft. At the same conference the dramatic idea of the Messerschmitt 262 lightning bomber was born, although it was only under relentless pressure from the Fuehrer that this took place.

2. The Fighter Staff was set up in the early summer of 1943.*

3. No, not in February, but after the destruction of the synthetic oil plants towards the end of the year 1944.

4. Not until the beginning of July, 1944.

82. Only a few.

83. Saur was a thoroughly self-opinionated and conceited individual, reserved and deceitful in his relations with the Luftwaffe.

As far as his attitude towards his fellow workers and his own ministers was concerned, he took pains to eliminate all competition from other people for the Fuehrer's favour and to get himself into a powerful position on his own.

84. This is not true. There was always a priority list of objectives to be defended against air attack; it was only the priorities which varied.

We were only able to switch our concentrations by moving our forces away from other objectives, for there was no A.A. reserve. As far back as autumn, 1943, we asked the Minister for Armaments and War Production for an up-to-date and complete priority list of objectives to be defended which would be valid in all departments, because of the continual disputes we had been having with the various armaments authorities, officials concerned with national defence, Gauleiters, commercial representatives and the Supreme Commands of the Navy and of the Armed Forces, each of which thought that its own individual department was the only one that mattered.

At the end of 1943 and early in 1944 synthetic oil plants stood high on the priority list. A scheme for substantially strengthening the defences of these works was drawn up and was put into operation at once.

85. That is correct, but he only asked for it because he had never taken it sufficiently into consideration before.

A.A. Artillery. If I remember correctly, the production of heavy barrels was supposed to reach a total of 1,000 per month. I believe that the highest total which we reached in one of the summer

/months

*Fighter Staff
Set-up March, 1944.

R E S T R I C T E D

- 24 -

months in 1944 was 800. We reached 500 to 600 occasionally, nevertheless from late summer onwards production began to fall again and reached a low level in the spring of 1945.

86. Ammunition. We suffered from an acute shortage of ammunition. The restrictions on firing were very considerable. Only approaching targets were to be fired at, shooting was only to take place when aiming conditions were perfect and no standing barrages were to be put up. Hitler always maintained that the reason why there was no A.A. ammunition was because the Luftwaffe did not wish for any. I refuted his statement when I was Director of Luftwaffe Operations by quoting the exact amounts of ammunition for which we had asked. In spite of this he still made the same assertion. In this connection it is interesting to note that as far back as 1939 - before the war - Goering asked the Fuehrer that 1 to 2 million rounds of heavy A.A. ammunition be produced per month in the event of war. The Fuehrer rejected this request, saying that it was downright ridiculous and that 100,000 rounds a month would be ample. (This is confirmed by Oberst von Below, who was there at the time).

It was the Fuehrer's own fault that there was not enough A.A. ammunition available, quite apart from the shortage of explosives which arose later.

The Fuehrer acted in the same way in connection with materials for smoke screens. He told me in 1945 that there was no "smoke" available because the Luftwaffe did not want any, yet as far back as in autumn, 1943, we asked for 12,000 tons a month for the Luftwaffe and in the early months of 1944 we asked for an increase to 17,000 tons a month. Production at its height never exceeded 5,000 to 6,000 tons, however, for the Luftwaffe, the Navy and other interested parties combined.

In the early summer of 1944 we had several thousand searchlights in stock. I could not use them because of a lack of personnel. Besides this there was a shortage of fuel for the generators. It was not possible to use the main power supply everywhere and there was a shortage of cables. Despite this, industry continued to produce 600 searchlights a month. We said we only wanted 60 to 70 searchlights a month and asked that the surplus production be stopped. Shortly afterwards we cancelled our demands for 60 to 70 and the Army and Navy said they did not want any allocation at all. In spite of all this, the Fuehrer gave instructions that 400 searchlights were to be produced per month. I never discovered how this came about nor who used mean and selfish motives in making the Fuehrer take these measures. If nobody persuaded him to do so, then the only conclusion one can draw is that Hitler was mentally deranged.

87. The idea which was formed early in the war that enemy escort fighters were careless and inefficient unfortunately proved to be wrong later. The fighters lost their early uncertainty, gained experience and changed over from defensive to offensive tactics. Our own fighters, acting on instructions, tried to outflank the fighter escort so as to get at the bombers, but they experienced something of a shock when they discovered that the enemy fighters' performance was superior to their own.

Right from the beginning we should have diverted increasing numbers of forces to combat enemy escort fighters.

88. It is incorrect to say that it was not intended to oppose day-time penetration raids in the spring and summer of 1944. It was not until the end of 1944 and in 1945 that this procedure was adopted. The 1,000 fighter operation was achieved through the shifting and strengthening of forces.

/89.

R E S T R I C T E D

R E S T R I C T E D

- 25 -

89. The Luftwaffe repeatedly reinforced and supported ground defences by putting in numerous A.A. units for both ground and air defence. Over 3,000 additional light A.A. guns and 3,000 A.A. weapons (some with two and some with three barrels) were transferred from Reich territory alone, mostly from airfields in the Western Army zone, and were shifted to Normandy.

90. As a result of all my experiences in the West and several conversations which I had had with the Commander-in-Chief, West about the general situation and about defences in 1942 and 1943, it was quite clear to me when the invasion spearheads had not been repulsed by the third day that they never would be and that we had therefore lost the war. During the last few days before the invasion took place, I was constantly in touch on the telephone with General Zimmermann, the operational commander for the Commander-in-Chief West, whom I knew well through having worked with him, because I was anxiously waiting for the counter-attack which was supposed to take place immediately (according to what had been said before), but which failed to materialise as the days went by. On the evening of the third day I told Zimmermann in somewhat disguised yet unmistakable terms of my conviction, which I have already mentioned. We agreed, as we always did.

During this time I also talked to Zeitzler every day, since we had worked together in the West earlier on and this region was of great interest to us both. We were both shocked to see that all the plans and promises which had been made earlier were not being carried out. We agreed that everything would be lost unless a counter-attack was staged along the whole front-line using all possible reserves, which might push the enemy back into the sea immediately after they had landed.

Korten shared our opinion, although he did not assert it, and many other staff officers in the Supreme Commands of the Army and of the Armed Forces felt exactly the same about it. It was only the representative leaders at the highest level who acted as though it were unimportant to put the situation right.

My view of the matter which I expressed to Goering and Jodl did not have a sympathetic hearing, however. Goering had no time and hardly listened, while Jodl pinned his hopes first on one projected counter-attack and then on another, although each one collapsed either when it was being prepared or when it began, for it was too late.

While I personally felt a shudder of apprehension, there were others who pretended to be in good heart and for some days certain individuals were more concerned with little Edda's (*) birthday than they were with the military situation. (It is from this time that the beginning of Goering's increasingly negative attitude dates).

It was absolutely clear that the German armed forces in the West would never be able to hold an increasingly strong enemy bridgehead as well as all the other forces. A break-through to the Rhine was imminent. The only way in which a German front-line might possibly have been set up would have been by immediately transferring all our forces from the Atlantic zone and the south coast (after the bridgehead had been established) and by consequently bringing in troops from Normandy behind the Somme - Marne - Rhone line.

/The

(*)Goering's daughter

R E S T R I C T E D

G.38525/BC/3/56/

R E S T R I C T E D

- 26 -

The Supreme Command of the Armed Forces and the Fuehrer buried their heads in the sand. I do not know what they were waiting for. The following remark by the Fuehrer is interesting. About the beginning of July, after the conference on the Obersalzberg, when most of the participants were on their way out and I and a few other officers were standing by his table putting away our papers, the Fuehrer turned to us and said: "Perhaps you gentlemen think that I am not looking at the situation in its true light or that I am waiting for a miracle. I am not; we shall get the situation under control again. But I should have to be forgiven even if I were waiting for a miracle. Wasn't that what Frederick the Great did?"

91. Did Goering believe this propaganda? We knew for certain that apart from the V1 and the V2 (which had already been in operation) and some relatively unimportant special weapons of the Navy, there were no more secret weapons to be anticipated in the near future and we became furiously angry at the lying and deceitful propaganda that was being circulated.

92. With what justification and with what object? Was this an example of leadership from responsible quarters? Surely it only made matters worse.

93. It only looked like this when seen through the eyes of Goering's circle of friends. The restoration of a relationship of trust between the men and their leaders was no longer to be expected. In any case no such relationship existed between the General Staff and Goering. The first condition for this was lacking, namely that the Commander-in-Chief should reform his attitude, his manner, his personal relationships and the decisions he made and that he should remove the "drones" from his court circle. He did none of these things.

Besides this General Korten had been too obliging to Goering and had cultivated an outward show of diplomatic optimism which was often quite ridiculous.

He was a very friendly person and people liked him, but he did not have the complete confidence of the commanders-in-chief, the generals or of many commanding officers when he was Chief of Air Staff. As regards personal relationships, he was very harsh with Loerzer, who was like a red rag to a bull as far as the whole Luftwaffe was concerned. Besides this he had personally had enough of his job by the early summer of 1944 and had reached a stage where he would have been ready to hand over his post had the possibility presented itself. Privately he disagreed with the Fuehrer like we all did and shared Zeitzler's point of view. Of Goering Korten said that he behaved like an ill-bred child with whom it was impossible to work seriously.

I had a deep insight into General Korten's views, opinions and frame of mind during the last few weeks in Berchtesgaden before his death; I was indeed in close touch with him most days and nights and had his full confidence. I do not believe that other people know as much about what he really thought, for he knew how to hide this admirably beneath his beaming smile.

94. There can be no question of an intensification of training. This was absolutely superficial on account of the fuel situation, the time factor and the weather conditions.

95. The fuss began in April when the Fuehrer wanted the Messerschmitt 262 jet to be used as a fighter-bomber and he kept agitating about this until late autumn. Goering was very depressed and embittered; he frequently opposed this idea, but perhaps he did not do so strongly enough. In any case if the Fuehrer was as unpleasant to him as he was to me, to Christian, Below and other officers who recommended that the Messerschmitt

/262

R E S T R I C T E D

R E S T R I C T E D

- 27 -

262 should be used as a fighter aircraft, then one can understand his attitude, even though one cannot excuse it. The Fuehrer's attitude to this whole business was inconceivably obstinate and he heaped curses upon the heads of those who stood in his way. Most people were afraid of him and obeyed him blindly.

When, on the Fuehrer's instructions, I was sent to the West on August 13th to gain a picture of the Air situation there and to make a report on it, I again took the opportunity of championing the cause of the Messerschmitt 262 being used as a fighter aircraft. Amongst many other brief teleprint messages which I sent to the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces and to the Chief of Air Staff, I sent the following one, which I wished to be submitted to the Fuehrer:- "Messerschmitt 262s should be sent to the front-line as fighter aircraft as soon as possible."

This message was not submitted to the Fuehrer because it was feared that it would cause him to have a dangerous breakdown.

Before I was due to report to the Fuehrer on my return, the then Chief of Air Staff, General Kreipe, who was acting on Goering's instructions, expressly forbade me to mention to Hitler the subject of the Messerschmitt 262 being used as a fighter. I was told that this was in the interests of the relationship between the Supreme Command of the Luftwaffe and the Fuehrer and in my own interest.

I did mention it nevertheless. Field Marshal Keitel was there at the time. On this occasion the Fuehrer listened quietly for the first time. He showed that he did not agree with the idea, but did not express any personal opinion on the subject. I think that I penetrated his obstinate shell of resistance on this subject for the first time then.

96. Peltz made the following tactical mistakes:-

(a) Starting times were too late. Formations could have started 45 minutes to an hour earlier, instead of which they had to hang about on the airfields and were cursing at not being allowed to set off.

(b) It was a mistake to "rendez vous" over the target areas. It would have been better to do so over the front line or at some agreed point on the way or to let each formation start as soon as possible while it was still dusk.

(c) Low-level flying over the coast was inexpedient. It would have been better to have climbed to 1,000 meters and to have come down lower after crossing into enemy territory.

(d) It was a mistake to fly too close to enemy air bases.

At a conference with Goering and Peltz, I particularly drew attention to these points, talked about them and warned Peltz, but Goering sided with Peltz. (By the spring of 1945 Goering had completely broken with Peltz, but then he had already done this before in the spring of 1944).

If they had followed my advice, losses would have been considerably smaller and our successes correspondingly greater.

/VII. 1945

R E S T R I C T E D

G.38525/BC/3/56/

R E S T R I C T E D

- 28 -

VIII. 1945

97. The Fuehrer and the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces thought that they would at least be able to hold the Rhine.

98. Bit by bit from the modest reserves behind the Vistula front.

99. No, not so. The thrust was directed towards Duna-Földvár. All the territory to the west of the Danube and south of the lake was first to be cleared of the enemy. What was to happen next was an open question. A thrust might have been made to the north from the territory west of the Danube or the Army might have been withdrawn to Poland.

When the decision was made, it was already clear that the western area of Budapest would only be able to hold out for another 8 days at the most. Guderian had planned that the offensive should start in 4 weeks time, however. It was a mistake to make the thrust towards Duna-Földvár after it was certain that Budapest would fall. At that decisive first conference at the Fuehrer's H.Q. I predicted to Guderian that he would come to grief if he made a large-scale side-thrust from Budapest against the deep flank of the 6th Army to the north of Veszprém and Lake Balaton. Guderian said I was right and it was agreed that he should have a second conference with Hitler the next day, but apparently he did not get his own way with the Fuehrer.

100. What is meant by saying that at this particular time the Fuehrer held fast to this design? Hitler did not decide to switch the 6th SS Panzer Army to Hungary until the Russians were advancing towards Pommern and the Oder. Although his entourage (and particularly the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces) was expecting the 6th SS Panzer Army to rally and move towards Pommern and to attack in the direction of Posen, and although the Fuehrer had talked about the execution of this plan for a long time, he suddenly said: "No, I'm going to make a bold decision now. The 6th SS Panzer Army is going to Hungary."

His decision was founded on the idea that it was necessary to capture the oil supply and that the enemy would be halted in the North in any case. He was counting on a big surprise success, because everyone would be expecting the 6th SS Panzer Army in the North. A condition for success in Hungary, however, was that the western area of Budapest should continue to hold out, but it was clear that it would not be able to do so.

101. It was dissipation of energies to re-train and re-equip old bomber formations with this type of aircraft. This scheme, organised by Peltz and Kraft, was never finished and achieved little. The Messerschmitt 262 should have been given to the best fighter pilots immediately.

102. Thorough preparations were made for this three times and twice the plan had to be abandoned because the Army lost our air bases to the enemy. After the range of the aircraft had been further increased, the scheme was cancelled for the third time by Hitler himself, in the same way as the operation by IV Fliegerkorps had been cancelled earlier.

103. Milch observes in this connection:- "This state of affairs existed even earlier in the Luftwaffe, thanks to Hermann Goering and his close circle." There is a lot of truth in this.

104. Too late, as usual.

/IX.

R E S T R I C T E D

G.38525/BC/3/56/

R E S T R I C T E D

- 29 -

IX. Concluding remarks

105. But only underestimated by Hitler, Goering and the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces.

106. This was unfortunately not recognised by the Supreme Command, nor by the Commander-in-Chief and his circle.

107. This was underestimated by the whole Supreme Command and the Commander-in-Chief of the Luftwaffe, who rejected the factual and expert reports on the enemy's strength and armaments, because the truth was unpleasant to them. I remembered Hitler's reference to waiting for a miracle, which would have to be forgiven, for that was what Frederick the Great had done.

In 1939, shortly before the outbreak of the war, I made the following remarks in the company of a small circle of people:- "If the western powers become involved in this war and, above all, if America does (which is a reasonable supposition), the outlook is very black as I see it. If that happens, I can see no possibility of our winning the war on a purely military basis; we are altogether far too weak to do so."

Two years later, a Party member who was there when I said this kept threatening to denounce me for defeatism and insulting the armed forces. That's how things were in Germany. I managed to stave off the denunciation, however.

108. I do not know whether he really recognised the importance of increasing aircraft production; if so, he should have taken action. Fundamentally Hitler hated the Luftwaffe and aircraft themselves in particular. Perhaps his obstinate disposition prevented him from recognising the importance of production and from acting accordingly. He often said that all the misfortunes of the modern world could be traced back to the fact that men had learnt to fly and to aircraft, which had their beginnings in the First World War. He thought that aircraft were the lowest kind of weapon imaginable. If he had won the war, he would certainly have done what he suggested to the great powers before the war, that is to say he would have abolished military aircraft and would have seen to it that aviation ceased to exist all over the world, including Germany. This may sound fantastic, but he stated it so plainly that there can be no doubt as to his belief and his wishes.

109. But not by Peltz.

110. Was it for this reason that no supplies of suitable aircraft were forthcoming and that remote-controlled bombs were done away with?

111. Also lacking was a clear-cut and intelligent leadership by Hitler and Goering and by the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces.

112. And this was the fault of our short-sighted leaders.

113. Messerschmitt 162? Ridiculous.

Final Observations

The author has as he says himself, written very subjectively about German Air Force Policy during the 2nd World War. Along with a great deal of correct information, there are many factual mistakes, historical inaccuracies and chronologically false statements.

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R E S T R I C T E D

R E S T R I C T E D

- 30 -

In compiling my observations, it is not my intention personally to criticise the author and his work. The purpose of my remarks is to throw some light on the events and happenings as seen in their practical aspect by the planning staff, the higher command and in my own experience and to correct details as far as possible. I have had to rely on my memory for all this, as I have no access to any written records.

I am quite certain that outsiders cannot understand (and in fact never will quite be able to understand) the peculiar conditions which prevailed in Germany and amongst its leaders in the days of the Third Reich and that they will therefore be bound to gain a distorted view of Germany and the German people. All this can only be understood by a person who has actually experienced these conditions and gone through all the trials and tribulations connected with them.

In my opinion the most inglorious features of the whole National Socialist system from 1933 until its collapse was the deep mistrust which everybody felt for everyone else. It was never possible to know whom one could trust or to whom one could speak openly and frankly. These conditions prevailed amongst the ordinary people in their everyday lives; it was the same on the local councils and at every conference and meeting up to and including those held at the highest level. The Luftwaffe was also influenced by this atmosphere.

When did the people in high positions in the Luftwaffe ever sit down to discuss a problem quietly and frankly? Never. We never knew what would be openly stated and what would be kept back, nor did we know what ulterior motives might be pursued.

Our conferences were made up of a mixture of distrust, irritability, accusations, threats, reproaches and unreliable people's amateurish ideas. Practically every conference was a drama in which the last act was missing - that is to say the one in which decisions were made.

I have been told that it was the same in peace-time and I have no reason to doubt this. Was it any different where the Fuehrer himself was concerned? When was it possible to discuss anything quietly with him?

Signed: KOLLER

(Transcription finished on 26th October, 1945).

R E S T R I C T E D