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AIR HISTORICAL BRANCH

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EXTRACTS FROM REPORTS OF

FUEHRER CONFERENCES HELD

AT THE BEGINNING OF JANUARY 1945,

ON 10.1.45, AND ON 27.1.45.

TRANSLATED BY

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CONFERENCE HELD AT THE BEGINNING OF JANUARY, 1945

The Fuehrer said that the German army had an enormous number of radio operators, and if they were organised properly, as Kesselring had organised them, then they would work effectively.

Goering said that he thought the best system was that evolved by SS Oberstgruppenfuehrer Sepp Dietrich; but the Fuehrer said that he, too, complained that his radio operators were bad.

The Luftwaffe, said Goering, had transferred some of its aircrew signallers to the army, and Jodl interrupted to say that he had read that day that some of the personnel being transferred from the air force to the army had been 8 weeks on the way; they had been moving around from one barracks to another.

Later Jodl said that he had had a report from an agent in Antwerp saying that on December 17th a V2 had fallen on the "Rex" cinema during a performance. There had been 1,100 casualties, including 700 soldiers.

The Fuehrer said that this was the first successful shot; but the story sounded almost fantastic, and he could hardly believe it.

Later, the Fuehrer said that he was not continuing the occupation of Petsamo for pleasure. If Petsamo were evacuated where would all the nickel come from? As it was, he was beginning to have fears about the effect of the shortage of nickel on the production of the jet Me 262s. They were making good progress with the electrical method for hardening iron, but it took years before theory and experiment became practical reality. And time was just the commodity which Germany did not possess. She had sufficient coal, but her transport system was being destroyed.

The Fuehrer said that he had been attacked on account of his "mad" policy of holding on to vast areas of land. But armies could only be supplied if they had a large hinterground on which they could rely.

He had given orders the previous day that 50% of the Me 262s should be fitted to carry 500 Kg. bombs. The enemy's transport network would have to be attacked, and perhaps Antwerp could be raided in daylight. They could not depend only on V1 and V2 weapons.

As the British had revealed, a German weakness in N. Africa was their lack of a railway system; but such a system would still have been of little use as the Luftwaffe did not have air superiority. It was essential to have both railways and air superiority; railways alone were useless.

He was amazed, the Fuehrer continued, how effective the work of improvisation on the German railways had been. Other countries had been crippled in less than a week by attacks which had been child's play in comparison. If the enemy could be attacked in this way, he would be in difficulties, because he did not have the facilities for repairing the damage.

END OF CONFERENCE

CONFERENCE HELD ON 10TH JANUARY, 1945

The Fuehrer quoted a certain report to Goering, and said that it was obvious from this that some piece of information had leaked out.

Goering told of an incident which had happened while he was telephoning. The lines had been crossed and he had heard a conversation about V1 and V2. During this conversation, the phrase "rocket transporter" had occurred. These things had to be sent somewhere by the following morning, etc. etc. The conversation had gone on for about a quarter of an hour.

/That

That was the first time he had heard the expression "rocket transporter".

Western front. Zimmermann then began to give details of the situation on the western front. There had been practically no activity on the front held by Heeresgruppe H. A single reconnaissance attack had been beaten off. Otherwise there was only German patrol activity and slight outbursts of firing to report.

The heavy and sharp attacks on the northern flank of Heeresgruppe B seemed to be losing momentum. Pressure was hardest in the area of Bastogne and in the region around Lottre.

Parts of the 1st and 5th Panzer Divisions had been surrounded in three groups, one in Herbsheim, another in Rossfeld, and a third and larger group, in the area of Obenheim, to the north. This group had tried without success to break out.

The Fuehrer asked if it were known that the 5th Bulgarian Army had been disbanded on account of the complete unreliability of both the officers and the men. This news had been given over the radio.

Jodl proceeded to compare the east and west fronts. Counting the Netherlands coast, the front in the west was 1175 Km. long as opposed to 1800 Km. in the east. There were 1145 fortress guns in the west as compared with 1062 in the east. In the west there were 51 motorised battalions and 94 in the east. Assault artillery was noticeably stronger in the east; 31 battalions against 11.

There was then a discussion of a possible entry of Sweden into the war on the enemy's side. Jodl did not think this likely, and he did not see the need for any special preparations.

The Fuehrer agreed.

Russian front. Hermani said that the tank battle to the north of Stuhlweissenburg was still going on. Attacks had been made from the south on Sarkeresztes; during the morning's fighting, 4 enemy tanks had been destroyed; details of German losses had not yet been received.

The previous evening's attempt to push through to Budapest had been met by heavy enemy anti-tank fire. The position in the Budapest bridgehead continued to be serious. It was essential that a landing ground be built, so that supplies could be flown in.

Hermani had had a radio report on the fighting of the previous day. There had been very heavy street fighting, with heavy losses on both sides. Shortage of supplies was forcing the most rigid economy; material flown in amounted to 3 tons.

The Fuehrer then discussed the possibility of seaplanes landing on a $1\frac{1}{2}$ Km. stretch of the Danube; Goering said that such an operation had already been carried out, when a Junker was used.

The Fuehrer then ordered that as many gliders as possible should be rushed to that part of the front; they could land anywhere; if need be they could even land in the streets. He was prepared to disregard Goering's warning that a glider was generally a total loss after it had been used. They had to try anything and everything.

Weiss revealed that there was a big parade ground, 800 metres long, and perfectly flat; it was easy to find. This would provide an adequate landing ground.

Goering approved, and added that the castle would shelter the area against the wind. (This parade ground was at the foot of the slope on which the castle stood.)

/Christian

Christian said that the gliders were spread out in four different regions, and it would be necessary to concentrate them for this operation.

The Fuehrer then spoke of the difficulty of attacking the B 29s which flew in formations of 20 to 40; a few fighters flew into the midst of them and were shot down before they could open up with their guns. Once again it was plain to see that mistakes had been made, just as mistakes had been made with the Heinkel 177, the dive-bombers and the armament of fighter aircraft. The fighters had not sufficient armament and the result was that the bomber formations flew on as though they were unopposed. The potential dangers were terrific; in the Far East it could be seen that the enemy was flying across enormous distances; it was not possible to say to oneself that that sort of thing would not happen in Germany too. It would happen.

Meanwhile the enemy was suffering no losses, or practically none. It was like an exercise being carried out in bright sunshine. If things went on as they were, perhaps one day the enemy would be able to do without fighters altogether. Moreover, one had to consider the effect on civilian morale if the people saw German fighter aircraft unable to achieve success against the raiding bombers.

The Japanese mainland was being attacked by 70 to 100 aircraft; in a short time the number would rise to 200, then 500, then 1,000, and then 2,000, because the enemy had facilities for industrial mass-production. When this stage had been reached, the valour of the individual airmen would count for nothing, because their aircraft would not be adequate.

For a year now, huge aircraft had been operating in the west, aircraft with a span of more than 70 metres, carrying up to 18 tons, or 124 fully-armed men, the engines of these aircraft were 2,600 h.p. And yet the Luftwaffe was relying on 2 and 3 cm. cannon; in his view, the absolute minimum would be the 5 cm. cannon. If this weapon could be fitted into the 262, an enormous advantage would be gained; the fighters would not have to fly to within 50 metres before opening fire. Nobody expected them to be able to wipe out whole formations, and he would be satisfied if they could account for 4 aircraft out of every formation. The enemy would not be able to stand these losses over a long period of time.

He did not consider that there was any immediate danger from enemy jet aircraft.

Goering said that even when it was equipped with the 5 cm. cannon the 262 could still fly at 700 Km.p.h.

The Fuehrer hoped that it would be possible for swarms of 262s to attack with their 5 cm. cannon from a distance of 1,000 metres or perhaps even from 2,000 metres. Then the enemy formations would really go to pieces.

He then spoke of a conference which he had held in Berlin with tank experts. They had expressed their preference for a number of smaller guns, rather than one large cannon. They had argued that it would not be possible to destroy a heavily armoured tank; but by firing repeatedly at it, they might be able to compel it to turn back. That was the expert opinion. He alone had held the view that it was better to fire one shot, and let that be a mortal one.

There had been the same argument about naval weapons. Witzel had told him that he would rather have a 28 cm. gun with plenty of ammunition than a 38 cm. or 40 cm. or 42 cm. gun. But he (the Fuehrer) would have preferred a 53 cm. gun with less ammunition.

The Fuehrer then referred to V1 and said that unfortunately it could not decide the war.

/Returning

Returning to the problem of aircraft armament, the Fuehrer quoted a newspaper report that the enemy bombers had as many as 24 12.7 mm. cannon.

Only half of these could be used simultaneously, retorted Goering.

The guns were in turrets, said the Fuehrer, and they covered every angle; in addition, the aircraft flew in echelon formation, so that nearly every gun was brought to bear.

He then referred the whole problem of aircraft armament to Goering.

END OF CONFERENCE

CONFERENCE HELD ON 27TH JANUARY, 1945

The first spokesman was Dr. Schuster who gave a detailed review of the meteorological reports dealing with both the eastern and western fronts.

90% of the British airfields were within an area of bad weather conditions, and from England itself had come the announcement of considerable falls of snow, together with low temperatures.

In the east, the Oder was frozen along almost its entire length. The ice was approximately 50 cm. thick, and so it was possible to move vehicles over; another 10 cm., and it would then be possible to cross with tanks also.

The Danube was frozen over at Budapest.

In the Baltic, Pillau was free of ice, and would remain so for the entire winter, despite the easterly winds and low temperatures. Koenigsberg on the other hand was beginning to be iced up, and the Koenigsberg Seekanal could only be kept open with the aid of ice-breakers.

Dr. Schuster then discussed the possibility of breaking up the ice on the Oder by altering the level of the water in the river. Enormous stocks of water would be required to do this, if the initial force was not going to be lost over the long stretches which had to be covered. Moreover, the temperature had to be in the neighbourhood of zero, then the ice would break up more easily.

Russian front Guderian said that the situation in Budapest was grave, and was growing even more acute. The enemy had moved the focal point of his attack, and had advanced to capture the part of the city where most of the airborne supplies were dropped. A counter-attack had been started but it was doubtful whether it would succeed. The casualties of late had been high. The enemy was attempting to build a bridge over the Danube to the Margaretenwiese.

Discussing the plans for bringing new forces up to the front from the west, the Fuehrer said that there was no escaping from the fact that it would take 6 or 8 weeks before a really significant transfer of strength could be effected. He personally would be quite content if the I and II Korps could be brought up within the space of 14 days. He thought the local German commander would have to go over to the defensive as soon as possible, before it was too late, and try to form a front between the Valencze Sea and the Danube.

Then Guderian resumed his commentary on the position on the front held by the central army group. (Heeresgruppe Mitte).

/On

On the 17th Army sector, very heavy fighting had developed; attacks had been launched all the way along the line from Richau to Auschwitz, and in the course of these Auschwitz itself had been lost.

The enemy had encircled Mieslowitz and had pressed on as far as Kattowitz. Street fighting was in progress in Kattowitz, and enemy tanks had entered the southern part of the town. Units of the 20th Panzer Division had been ordered to counter-attack and drive the enemy out.

Further north, there was fighting for the Oder crossings. During the previous day the enemy had been thrown back near Krappitz, but he had attacked that morning again, and had succeeded in getting over the river. Counter-attacks had been launched to throw the enemy back.

Near Oppeln, troops under the command of General Hoffmann had been able to compress the enemy bridgehead. At two points, German troops had been able to force their way through to the river bank.

The enemy had crossed the river between Brieg and Ohlau, and though counter measures had been taken, they had not proved successful.

South east of Breslau the 269th Division had been strongly attacked, but had maintained its position.

A difficult situation had arisen south of Steinau and near Koeben, where the enemy had been able to make deep penetrations in the direction of Herzogswalde and Rauthen.

With effect from that day (27. 1. 45) the 9th Army would come under the command of the Reichsfuehrer (i.e. Himmler) as part of the Vistula Army Group (Heeresgruppe Weichsel).

The troops which had been able to cross the line between Glogau and Graetz, were for the most part reconnaissance units. German troops had been successful in holding the Tirschtiegel positions.

Fegelein then interrupted Guderian to say that the Reichsfuehrer had just given the order that the Tirschtiegel positions were to be manned by the Volkssturm, and all the remaining troops should move forward.

The Fuehrer expressed his satisfaction with this arrangement.

Guderian then asked and was granted permission to use officers from the Kriegsakademie, together with 2 companies of the Wachregiment, to form a line directly to the west of the Oder. This line would have a high percentage of officers, and they would have the task of covering the roads from Breslau to Glogau.

Guderian said that the position on the sector of the 2nd Gardepanzerarmee was becoming more complex; the bridgehead of Usch was in German hands that morning, but the enemy had by-passed it and had crossed the Netze.

Near Krone, the position was also vague; Bromberg was in enemy hands.

The 252nd Division was holding the eastern edge of the Kulm bridgehead, which had been compressed.

The Fuehrer said this might have to be given up.

It would have to be given up, said Guderian. The Reichsfuehrer intended to evacuate the larger bridgehead at Kulm and hold a smaller one at Marienwerder.

/Near

Near Gransee the enemy had penetrated the German positions; he had also attacked Graudenz, but had been repulsed.

Weak enemy forces had been able to cross the river south of Mewe.

The main enemy pressure was to the north of Koenigsberg, where a critical situation had arisen.

Guderian praised General Lasch, the Corps commander in the fortress of Koenigsberg as "one of the most outstanding people we have up there." Koch had telephoned Lasch to say that the position was growing more and more serious, and Lasch had gone personally to restore some sort of order.

Enemy concentrations suggested that Libau might be attacked.

The Fuehrer thought this most likely, and said that the enemy would try to take the town for its harbour. Libau must, therefore, be strongly defended.

Goering then mentioned that there were 10,000 aircrew officer prisoners of war near Sagan, and there was not adequate transport to move them. Were they to be left to be taken over by the Russians?

The Fuehrer said that they must be moved at all costs. The Volksturm would be responsible for the guards, and any man who tried to break away from the columns would be shot.

Goering asked about transport.

Judging by German standards said the Fuehrer, it would need 20 troop trains to convey 10,000 men, but by Russian standards, only 5 or even 3 would be needed.

Goering suggested taking away those men's boots and trousers so that they could not escape through the snow.

Guderian said that Wlassow wished to put forward certain views.

Goering objected to Wlassow's forces wearing German uniforms.

The Fuehrer said he had always been opposed to the idea, but the army had been in favour. Some people had no sense of honour, they put every one in a German uniform. He had been opposed to the Cossacks wearing German uniforms; they should have been given Cossack uniforms, with insignia to prove that they were fighting on the German side. It was more romantic that way, too. The British did not have the idea of dressing up the Indians as British troops: they were allowed to go about, looking like Indians.

Goering said that all the Wlassow troops could do was to go over to the Russians.

But Fegelein did not agree. They would not go over because they would all be executed. The Russians had shot those workers who had worked for the Germans.

The Fuehrer said that they (i.e. the Germans) were doing the same in the West. The Allies were hard put to it to find a Burgomeister.

Guderian went on to ask the Fuehrer for permission to withdraw the 1928 category recruits from the more dangerous areas in the East.

/Keitel

Keitel revealed that the Russians were capturing as many as 50-60,000 of these troops a month.

The Fuehrer said that the loss of industrial regions was having its effect on the supplies of weapons available to the German forces.

Goering said it was no use making every effort to collect all the available man-power, when there were no weapons for the men. He had personally been responsible for withdrawing all small arms from flak units. He now heard of units with heavy batteries being overwhelmed in fighting in which they could not reply adequately, because they had no small arms.

The Fuehrer assured him that the armament programme now allowed for 900,000 pistols to be produced monthly.

In addition, said Buhle, there was the rifle known as the "Volksgewehr"; this was now in production. During January 8,000 would be delivered, 25,000 in February, and 50,000 in March.

The Fuehrer asked where the main centres of production of German rifles were.

Buhle told him that they were in Central Germany, in Suhl and Oberndorf; many rifles were produced in Wuerttemberg where there was an acute shortage of coal and electricity. Production figures for January were expected to be very poor.

Jodl then referred to the war in the west. The British 6th Airborne Division had been moved into the line in the area of Venlo. No additional divisions had been put in against the Roer bridgehead, though extra tank formations had been used.

Owing to the bad weather conditions - there had been snow and fog - neither side had undertaken any air operations on a large scale, said Goering.

The Fuehrer asked how long it would be before the units of the Panzerarmee arrived in Vienna, - always provided that the weather remained as it was for two or three days.

Jodl answered that one Korps would arrive within a fortnight; the other perhaps four or five days later.

The Fuehrer thought that they would arrive just in time because he anticipated the next crisis in that area. The 2nd Division had suffered a set-back but he was not worried by that. He told of an incident when a brand new division halted at a place for a rest. In a flash, the troops who had been in the fighting pounced on them, stole their bright new rifles and left their own dirty, rusty weapons behind. And nothing could be done about it.

Jodl then reported an enemy attack on the 6th Fallschirmjaeger-division, in which the enemy had lost 25 dead, and two flame-throwing tanks, which had been destroyed.

Goering insisted on the need for concentrating the parachute divisions; four of them were worth five of any other divisions.

Jodl said that the enemy had penetrated into Ottilienberg, but he had been thrown out again. Enemy progress was also reported from south of Hevenbach, but a counter-attack was being made. Three strong attacks in the direction of Burg Reyla had been repulsed. Heavy losses had been inflicted on the enemy.

The Fuehrer quoted a press report that the Americans had lost 85,000 men during that month (January). That was 50% of their losses in the whole of the 1914-18 war.

/Jodl

Jodl went on to say that there was lively activity in the region south-east of Saarburg. Large railway concentrations had been observed in the Metz area, and there was a large number of vehicles in the area of Zabern and Saarburg.

The Moder front had been quiet.

The fighting had been heavier south of Erstein, but nevertheless all the enemy attacks had been repelled. Similarly, all the attacks near Markolsheim had been beaten off, the enemy losing 8 of his tanks.

The Fuehrer gave his opinion that it was essential to hold firmly on to Breisach, and he wondered if it would be possible for the 6th SS Gebirgsdivision to join forces with the 2nd Gebirgsdivision to ensure this. Himmler had the same idea, as he was not able to achieve much with tanks alone in an area of 30 to 50 km. But a Gebirgsdivision could do what was required. If the position at Breisach could be resolved, it would ease the threat at other parts of the front. But something had to be done to give a greater degree of security, because Kolmar was so near.

The next part of the meeting was spent in a discussion as to whether there should be changes in command in the West.

The Fuehrer said that he had been told that Student had grown very tired.

Goering said that that was the opinion of every one who spoke to him, because they judged him from the terribly slow rate at which he spoke. But, apart from Model, Student was the best possible man when things went wrong; his first thought was to attack the enemy.

The Fuehrer said that Student had bungled things at times, yet he would be sorry to see Student go, and he asked if Blaskowitz were as tenacious as Student.

Goering replied that he was not; Student was worth ten of Blaskowitz. But nevertheless, he was prepared to dismiss Student, in the certain knowledge that one day he would be called back. If he had been left in Italy, the bridgehead would not have been allowed to come into being. When he left his present command, he would be put in charge of a paratroop army; then there would be at least one man who could be called on in the future and who would not falter or weaken. Perhaps he would talk even more slowly, but the slower he spoke, the slower he would retreat.

Jodl said that some move must be made to achieve more concentration of authority; too many military staffs merely produced difficulties. He suggested that Hausser should stay where he was, but that he should also assume command of the 1st Army.

He described Hausser as "an extremely sarcastic, witty man" and Keitel said that he was always ready with a reply.

The Fuehrer thought that he was definitely cunning and crafty, but he wondered whether he had fully recovered from his last serious wound.

Fegelein said that he had. Besides, the Reichfuehrer had suggested Hausser, and he was not likely to favour some one who would prove disappointing; when things went wrong, the Reichsfuehrer took all the blame on himself. Hausser adopted the attitude that, as he had been a soldier for nearly 65 years, he could wish for nothing better than to die bravely, doing battle with the enemy. Above all, he would hold out to the very end. He was not the kind of man who dived for cover as soon as he encountered artillery fire.

/The

The Fuehrer then gave his approval to Jodl's suggestion.

The Fuehrer said that there was some difficulty about the supply of artillery and shells. The material at present available was sufficient to meet normal demands, but it would not be adequate if there should happen to be an attack along a broad front. In such conditions it might be necessary to fire off as many as 500 or 600 rounds during a single day.

Jodl said that there was nothing to report from Italy, where snow and fog were hampering movement.

The Fuehrer, however, preferred to discuss the political implications of the war at this point in the meeting, and said he wondered how long the British would look with such favour on the activities of the Russians.

Goering said that the British had come into the war to prevent Germany expanding to the east, but that did not mean that they wanted the East to stretch right to the Atlantic.

The Fuehrer thought he saw some significance in the committee of German generals which the Russians had formed; if the Soviet were really trying to form an alternative national government, Britain would naturally become anxious. Already he could detect a bitter note in the British press.

Against this Goering set a report he had read which said that British bombers might support Russian forces in their advance, for their heavy bombers could reach the districts where the Russians were, and even further.

The Fuehrer said that there could be no question of tactical support for the Russians. The German army staff did not know where the Russian and German troops actually were, so how could the British hope to know?

The Fuehrer then mentioned that he had another unpleasant task; he was going to have another meeting with Quisling "to hypnotise him", but he thought that Quisling had gone completely mad.

Jodl then resumed his survey of the military situation.

He was in favour of evacuating the Visegrad bridgehead, as German troops no longer intended to attack in that direction. The local commander asked to be allowed to withdraw behind the Drina.

The Fuehrer approved.

Jodl went on to say that low-flying aircraft had attacked a hospital train and 10 soldiers had been killed and 7 wounded.

In the area of Viro Vitica, everything was quiet. Cossack troops were about to undertake operations to the south.

The Fuehrer agreed that they fought well, but he still wanted to know why they had been put into German uniform.

Jodl said that most of the men did wear Cossack uniforms; they had red fur caps, and red trousers with silver stripes.

Burgdorf said that General von Panwitz, the commander of the Cossack troops, always visited his men in full Cossack uniform. A picture had been taken, showing him looking quite wild, and wearing his curved sword.

Goering then read aloud a report on an action involving a Panzer-division of the Sauckenkorps. 5 Panther tanks had destroyed 25 of the enemy tanks.

The Fuehrer said he too had seen reports from the British or American press which frankly admitted German tank superiority.

/Guderian

Guderian said that the chief problem facing the German General Staff at the present time was the shortage of fuel.

Hewel reported that the Swedish press was writing sensational stories, claiming that the man who had invented the V weapon had arrived in Sweden. The text of interviews with a Professor Hartmann had been published. But when he himself had consulted the Luftwaffe and General Buhle, no one had heard of the name. The publication of sensational news quite suddenly was one of the tricks of the Swedish press.

Naval activity Assmann then gave the latest news of the war at sea.

Off the Norwegian coast, a German steamer of 2,900 tons, - part of a south-bound convoy - had been sunk, after receiving three direct hits from bombs.

South of Haugesund, minesweeping operations had been undertaken; mines had been laid off Stavanger.

According to radio reports, British MTBs were once again active off the west coast of Norway; so far none had been spotted.

Traffic between Oslo and Aarhus had been delayed by the bad weather and some of the convoys were between 7 and 10 hours late.

In the eastern Baltic, shipping operations were being carried out according to plan.

A further 25,000 refugees had been taken off from East Prussia, making the total of refugees received in the Reich from East Prussia 45,360.

While mines were being unloaded in Pillau there had been an explosion in which 19 people were killed; 207 mines had been detonated. The disaster was thought to have been caused by a falling mine.

It was intended to order the cruiser "Prinz Eugen" to put to sea in the area north of Ebing as soon as the weather was better.

The Fuehrer then asked if the "Schleswig Holstein" and the "Schlesien" could put to sea.

Assmann said that they were not really seaworthy: they were only used for training purposes, and von Puttkamer added that the 15 cm. guns had been dismantled.

Bad weather had made operations in the North Sea impossible, and there was nothing to report from the Mediterranean.

air activity Buechs spoke after Assmann, to describe recent air operations.

There had only been small-scale activity in Hungary, north-west of the Danube and south-west of Ipolysag.

In Silesia the centre of the attacks lay between Oppeln and Steinau. 103 aircraft had been engaged; and smaller attacks had been directed against Bentschen and Gleiwitz; there had been more powerful attacks, with 114 aircraft in the Marienburg area.

391 fighter had been employed on low-level attacks, in which they had destroyed 5 tanks and 178 vehicles in addition to scoring hits on two bridges between Oppeln and Breslau.

In the west, only fighter bombers had been in action, with the Ruhr as the focal point.

/During

During the night, 20 Mosquitos had flown in to attack Recklinghausen.

Bad weather had prevented further operations in the west and in Italy.

Buechs concluded by referring to a B.B.C. broadcast which said that 4 days' bad weather had prevented the R.A.F. from flying; but that this time would be used for a complete overhaul of the planes; 70,000 men and women were working during the lull to make the aircraft serviceable, ready to be used when the weather improved.

Burgdorf said he would like the Fuehrer to give his opinion in a matter relating to the status of officers.

Goering submitted his point of view to the Fuehrer. He did not think that retired officers who had been recalled should lose their rank. Admittedly, some of these older men could not occupy high positions, but there was no reason why they should come back to the services as mere N.C.O.s; loss of rank was always a punishment for some offence, and these men had done no wrong.

The Fuehrer foresaw difficulties if a General should be appointed to lead a company in a battalion which was commanded by an Oberleutnant.

Such an arrangement was splendid, countered Goering.

Burgdorf then told of thousands of officers who had had no real war experience since 1918; they had been filling administrative posts, and had not touched a gun for years. At a barracks in Wildflecken they were being selected for one of three categories. (a) Those who would be better employed in the economic life of the country. (b) Those who could be usefully employed in any position in their regiments. (c) Those officers who, during the war, had been persistently moved from one unit to another.

Goering explained the British system, in which rank and appointment went together.

The Fuehrer then asked for a comprehensive description of the British methods of promotion.

He said that he considered that the whole system of promotion in the German army should come under review, and that fundamental changes should be made. He favoured the adoption of the English method, with the rank corresponding to the appointment the officer held. If a man led a division, then he would be a divisional general, if he commanded a regiment, then he would be a colonel, and if he was in charge of a battalion, he would be a major.

Goering said that was his own view entirely.

Burgdorf said that Goering had stressed the bad effect produced in the Offizierskorps if an officer were demoted. But he had failed to mention that too speedy promotion was not well received either.

The Fuehrer said that Goering had mentioned "degradation" frequently, but it did not mean that a man was being degraded simply because he was being used in a position to which he was suited. That was no more "degradation" than when a managing director of a factory was called up as an ordinary soldier.

Goering said the argument did not apply; a company director had not chosen the Army as a career.

Keitel described the organisation which the Reichswehr had adopted. The officers wore no insignia other than stars, so that it was

/quite

quite possible for a general to be in command of a battalion. For a time the Reichswehr had abandoned rank, and each officer was regarded according to his appointment; there were no longer lieutenants, captains, majors, etc., but section commanders, company commanders or battalion commanders. The arrangement had, however, been abandoned as impracticable.

The Fuehrer said that there was only one way out; at a time like the present, rank had to be waived.

Jodl stressed that the feeling of degradation should not be allowed to arise unless there was some blame attached to the officer concerned.

The Fuehrer replied that degradation did not come into it. If the man proved himself capable, in a short time he would be performing duties commensurate with his rank.

Goering argued that a full acceptance of Burgdorf's plan would mean that there would be no officers willing to serve on the Staff, as they would have no chance of promotion.

Guderian then cited an instance of what had happened to an officer he knew well. This man had seen service in Poland, France and Russia, and had acquitted himself splendidly; he had been awarded the Iron Cross 1st Class. One of his countrymen had denounced him for statements (which he had not really made) alleged to have been made before the Anschluss (with Austria). As a result, the man was removed from his command, and transferred to the Granatwerferbataillon in Wildflecken. And there he was still, a fine, energetic and blameless man, carrying mortars around. From Wildflecken he had written bitter letters showing how he had been degraded for no reason, and how he had been punished without a reasonable hearing.

The Fuehrer said that there were two things which must not be allowed to happen; 45-year old men who had been soldiers all their lives could not be released from the service when 56-year old men were being conscripted; and officers who were not capable of leading should not be put in command.

Goering had a third proviso; no officer able to assume a command should be prevented from doing so simply because he had been on staff work.

The Fuehrer replied that if a man was worthy of a command he would be given one.

Fegelein said that the 10,000 British and American officers and M.C.O.s in Sagan would be moving out in two hours' time.

In addition, there were another 1,500 men who had been told that transport could not be arranged for them, they could be given the opportunity of staying where they were until they were taken over by the advancing Russian troops.

They had rejected that offer, and had said that they wanted to fight with the German against the Russians.

Hewel was doubtful. He saw in it a move to obtain arms, and he pointed out that the report was unconfirmed.

The Fuehrer, too, was sceptical; what was probably meant was that there had been one such request and this had been turned into a generalisation.

Hewel said they need not worry too much about leaving a few English officers to be taken over by the Russians, but Jodl thought there might be aircrew specialists among them.

END OF CONFERENCE.

A.H.B. 6 Distribution

Same as for Translation No. VII/53.

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