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AIR HISTORICAL BRANCH

TRANSLATION NO. VII/51

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EXTRACTS FROM REPORTS
OF FUHRER CONFERENCES
HELD EARLY IN 1944,
DURING MARCH 1944, ON
6.4.44, AND ON 18.5.44.

TRANSLATED BY

AIR MINISTRY, A. H. B. 6.

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CONFERENCE HELD EARLY IN 1944

Russian Front

The Fuehrer remarked that the Spaniards had requested the return of the Spanish "Blue Division".

Zeitzler agreed that he had heard of this.

Jodl said it was clear that the weapons must remain there whilst the troops were on leave.

The Fuehrer admitted that the men must be well treated.

Naval Situation

The Fuehrer said that the British had admitted that a passenger ship had been sunk with all lives lost.

Hewel remarked that there must have been 500 people on board.

The Fuehrer reckoned that, with a crew of 300, altogether 1,000 lives must have been lost.

Voss reported that according to the Grossadmiral not a single person was saved from the destroyers sunk in the last convoy.

Air Situation

Jodl reported that the Luftwaffe was no longer able to attack ships in the Mediterranean without also having to tackle the enemy Air Force.

The Fuehrer considered this to be ridiculous. On this basis, neither the Air Force nor ships were being attacked. It was useless to attack airfields. Only aircraft shot down in the air were any use. Aeroplanes could always be manufactured. It was more important to destroy crews. Another report should be handed in tomorrow.

Jodl agreed that the attacking of airfields must stop, and he would produce a new report on the next day.

The Fuehrer said that he wanted no more excuses for inactivity; shipping must be attacked, as that was far more important.

END OF CONFERENCE

CONFERENCE HELD AT THE BEGINNING OF MARCH, 1944

Russian Front

Zeitzler stated that there had been further attacks on the Ukraine front, but not in such strength as before. The general situation was favourable for us on account of ice conditions. There had been more activity here than of late, but there was no indication as to whether it would develop into something bigger or not.

Here there was a pause for listening to the enemy radio; then Zeitzler went on to say that dummy tanks had been built at three strong points, and it was therefore to be presumed that the enemy was taking troops away from these points. The position had deteriorated in the area west of Narva.

The Fuehrer insisted that the advances which the enemy had been able to make proved that the lessons of the previous three years had not been learned, - namely, that it was impossible to maintain a short line without adequate fortifications.

Buechs told the conference that air operations in the East had been limited to the southern sector where 130 bombers had supported troops on the Kertsch Peninsula. The First Panzer Army had received air support from 405 aircraft, of which 157 were used in the regions where break-throughs had been achieved.

The enemy was considerably weakened in flight, and during the previous day, when the weather was bad, only 230 Russian aircraft had operated in the Kertsch sector, the majority of these being used as fighter protection for enemy artillery and transports crossing the Kertsch Straits.

In the north, 8 aircraft had attacked the Murmansk railway, damaging the track and scoring direct hits on a train.

Only minor operations had taken place during the night, involving 24 aircraft, including "Pathfinders". There were no significant results to report.

Italy

Jodl reported that the left flank of the 3rd Panzer Grenadier Division had been attacked, and its outposts had had to be withdrawn to the line of defence. In the direction of Cisterna, no further attacks had been launched (by the enemy). The German plan of attack had now been so far evolved, that it was possible to report that all forces would be ready by the 1st (April ?)

The Panther battalion had arrived at the front; all preparation had been made for the attack, which was made by the 3rd Panzer Division with the 715th. in support.

The Fuehrer asked how many tanks could be thrown in.

Jodl was not able to supply the final total, but it would not be more than 160, with a number of assault guns and 8 "Tiger" tanks in addition.

On the central sector all was quiet, and on the left flank, movements had only been observed in the area of Castel Fretone.

Hitler then accused the generals of indecision, saying that they made large-scale operational plans and then were afraid to carry them out. They were like a horse which hesitated at a fence which was too high for it.

/Hewel

Hewel stressed the importance of political considerations, and said that no further large scale reverses could be allowed.

Balkans

Jodl said that the Brandenburg Regiment was engaged in mopping-up operations in the south. 23 had been killed; 95 bandits and 19 Italians captured.

In Bulgaria the 27th. Division would undertake mopping-up operations.

Armed bands were active in the hilly country; certain roads could only be used when an escort could be provided and it had been reported that light flak had sometimes to be used to ward off the fire from the hill-sides. It was only to be expected that these people would gather in the mountains.

The Fuehrer saw in these forces a potential threat in the event of a landing.

Jodl replied that they had not been of much significance up to now, but in the event of further enemy advances, more intensive mopping up would have to be undertaken. Under those circumstances it would be necessary to destroy the villages in the valleys, because the bands were living on them.

The Fuehrer was worried by the length of time taken to train troops. 14 days' training on the barrack square should be given and then the remainder of their training could be carried out in security activities against badly-armed bands. Thus they would have the best training.

Allied air raids

Korten told the Fuehrer that the British had announced the loss of 34 aircraft after the attack on Berlin. Only 23 had been claimed by us.

Keitel suggested that an additional claim should be made the following day.

In reply to the Fuehrer's question: "How many "certains" and "probables" did we claim?" Korten said that 22 "certains" and 1 "probable" had been claimed, so that it would be possible to increase the claim.

Naval situation

Assmann reported that air reconnaissance had been carried out all day, and that a convoy had been sighted at 09.55hrs. Unfortunately this was not reported until 16.00 hrs., because of a radio failure. Reconnaissance had been continued during the evening and at 17.15 hrs. the convoy comprised 55 merchant vessels and 8 destroyers. It was spotted in the early morning again at 0.23 hrs. Once again there had been a two-hour delay before a report could be sent to the Director of U-Boat Warfare (Atlantic)

A British steamer of 7,500 tons had been sunk by U 532 off the Lacedives, south of Bombay.

The enemy had been active around the island of Elba with destroyers and M.T. boats, but no attack had been launched on our coastal traffic.

The Naval Officer Commanding the port of San Benedetto reported a formation of vessels sailing north. These were probably the same forces which had shelled Pesaro and Recanati before making off.

Air Situation

Assmann continued that mine-laying operations had been carried out from Pola in the area south-east of Ancona. Contact had not been made with the enemy.

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The Luftwaffe had been active in the Aegian, laying mines off Salamis.

It was certain that the "Warspite" was in Gibraltar, and two French battleships, the "Lorraine" and the "Richelieu" were expected in Algiers. 2 English and 3 former Italian vessels were in the area Malata-Tunis. 3 warships and 2 Italian ships were in Alexandria; according to agents' reports they were heading for the Indian Ocean.

Agents had reported the presence of 488 tank landing craft in the defence areas of southern England. These would be sufficient to transport 25 divisions. To this total had to be added 195 tank landing craft in the Italian theatre of war and approximately 1,000 landing craft. Movements to the Mediterranean continued regularly and without noteworthy alterations.

Buechs said that at 18,00 hours radar had picked up aircraft over the Frisian Isles. The majority of them were flying in a south-westerly direction. A smaller number of aircraft flew in in an easterly direction, north of the Frisian Isles and then turned away at the coast. Having attacked Berlin from the south and south-west, the bombers flew out on a broad front far to the south of the Ruhr.

68 bombers and fighter bombers of the Luftwaffe had been used in 4 operations against the Anzio bridge-head. These included 5 aircraft equipped with 21 cm. mortar bombs. Good results were obtained on the landing places, and in addition one landing ship of 1,000 tons was sunk, while three merchant ships totalling 12,000 to 14,000 tons were severely damaged. The fighter escorts were engaged in aerial combat, and had shot down 3 enemy aircraft. Our own losses had totalled 5 aircraft.

During the night, attacks had been directed mainly against Anzio, Nettuno, and against shipping. A ship of 3,000 tons had been damaged. 3 German aircraft were lost. During the first half of the night enemy formations - it was not yet clear whether they were bombers or night fighters - had flown in. They had circled around for a very long time and appeared to be about to attack our ground forces. This attack did not take place until the second half of the night.

Korten said that it was now announced in England that the number of aircraft shot down (during the recent raid on London) had risen to.....

Hitler found these contradictory reports confusing; he felt that as many as 50% of the He 177's had dropped out. They had not even reached their target. He condemned the He 177 as "probably the worst aircraft ever produced". It was the flying version of the Panther, and the Panther was a "crawling Heinkel". How could it be asserted that there were only 30 over the London area? He had heard similar tales. He had been told that only 50 aircraft had been over Cologne: then, more and more had been added on, until finally it was said that nearly 1,000 had reached the city. The real total had been between 3 and 4 hundred. The most secret proceedings of the enemy War Council, their most secret intentions and plans were known; but we could not find out whether 3 houses or 100 or 500 or 1,000 had been burnt down in London.

Korten said that all our principal agents were operating, and Hewel stressed the need for patience. It was necessary to wait until someone got through to Stockholm. British security measures were very strict; not even accredited diplomats were allowed out of the country.

Hitler said that he had asked this question because it was plain that the majority of the aircraft had not reached London; only 30 or 40 had got through. What was being done about it?

Flying crews were being interrogated, answered Korten. The Reichsmarschall was interviewing the Geschwader commanders.

The Fuehrer was satisfied with this reply.

CONFERENCE HELD PRESUMABLY ON 6TH APRIL, 1944

Russian front

Buechs reported that on the Perekop front 32 aircraft had taken part in strafing raids.

On the 6th Army sector 123 bombers had been used in attacks on enemy tanks and columns in the area around Rasdelnaja, where the enemy had made penetrations, and in the area of Cornesti.

Supplies had been flown in to the 1st Panzer Army by 269 aircraft and 6 freight gliders. 223 aircraft supported the attack launched by the II. SS Panzer Korps, and helped in the fighting around Tarnopol.

Luftflotte 6 had supplied 209 aircraft during the previous day to support the join-up in the Kowel area. Behind the lines, 45 aircraft were used in actions against partisans.

Only in the central sector were weather conditions bad enough to prevent flying. Air operations were possible everywhere else.

Warlinont said that there still was nothing important to report from Finland, only reconnaissance and desultory firing. North east of Kandalakscha there had been a clash between German and Finnish raiding parties. The temperature varied from 10 to 12 deg. below zero to 2 deg. above, within the space of 24 hours, so that large-scale activity was hardly possible.

From the German Military Attache in Stockholm had come the report that Swedish mobilisation did not involve an unusually large number of troops.

In the Nettuno area, an attack had been made on German flak positions by Tomahawks, obviously based on an aircraft carrier. This attack revealed that the gun emplacements were rather unprotected. 3 guns were put out of action and 3 others damaged. Casualties numbered 5 dead and 16 wounded.

The significant thing in the Mediterranean was that several troop transports had been observed passing through the Straits of Gibraltar; in all, 27 had been spotted and of these, 7 had been reported as putting in to Gibraltar itself.

In Hungary all operations were going according to plan.

The Fuehrer said that he regarded the defensive measures being taken by the British as a kind of theatrical trick; they were not tackling their problems in the usual manner.

In a review of the American political situation, the Fuehrer said that he feared that Roosevelt might be elected again as the Republicans were unable to agree on the choice of their candidate. In Winsconsin Wendel Willkie had suffered an unprecedented defeat; that showed that not even the Americans would swallow everything which was offered to them.

Now Dewey was coming forward; he was a more honest man, and that was something in such a land of corruption. If some one could be found in America to represent American interests, then the course of events would change.

/ Greece

GREECE

Warlimont said that radio messages which had been intercepted showed that the partisans intended to mass in the north west, and then after a pause, to resume their march to the south east.

Here was an opportunity for German forces to strike at these movements, using 12 Bulgarian battalions to help.

The Fuehrer said that he had seen a press report that an ancient statue had been found somewhere in Greece while fortifications were being built, and that this statue had been handed over to the Greeks. That sort of thing should not be allowed, and he expressed the hope that in future anything which was found by German troops would be sent to Germany.

Keitel asked if the Fuehrer was aware that some old Spanish cannons had been found in France and that they had been presented by the Ambassador in Madrid to Franco as a gift from the Fuehrer?

Hitler said that presents were given in his name, about which he knew nothing. He had never thought of such a thing. It was none of Dieckhoff's business, (Dieckhoff was the German envoy in Spain) and on principle he did not give away articles of historic value. He made presents of motor cars. All future finds should be sent to him and he would see to it that they found their way to an appropriate museum or exhibition.

Assmann said that 20 mine-laying aircraft had attempted to fly into the Gironde estuary.

U 218 announced that it had laid mines outside S. Juan, off Puerto Rico.

In the Gulf of Taranto a convoy of 20 steamers had been spotted, heading for Taranto. There was coastal traffic in the Bari-Brindisi area.

Enemy submarines had been more active in the Aegean. 4 auxiliary sailing vessels had been sunk.

In the Black Sea 2 Soviet U-boats had been seen near Eupatoria.

Buechs stated that on the previous day, enemy activity in Italy had been slight, because of bad weather conditions. 3 aircraft were shot down. 200 four-engined bombers, with fighter escort as far as the Danube, had attacked Bucharest. A further 50 four-engined bombers had attacked Nisch half an hour later. These operations were opposed by 192 fighters, 60 of them German, 93 Rumanian and 39 Bulgarian. 48 of the attacking planes had been shot down and 3 more probables were claimed. These losses to the defence amounted to 12 aircraft, 9 German and 3 Rumanian.

The Fuehrer immediately asked why it was that the German losses were higher although they had had fewer fighters in action.

Korten explained that, though fewer German aircraft had been involved, they had accounted for 29 of the enemy, whereas the Rumanians had destroyed 19. He added that General Fiebig was quite certain that the total of aircraft shot down would reach 50.

END OF CONFERENCE.

CONFERENCE HELD ON 18th MAY, 1944.

Italian Front.

Jodl had news of heavy fighting. The 9th Panzergrenadier-regiment which had only recently taken up position, had had to face heavy attacks from both sides of S. Oliva. The enemy had not been able to make any progress and counter attacks had been launched.

There was extremely heavy fighting east of Ponto Corvo, where a concentration of as many as 200 guns was to be found. No news had been received on the progress of the fighting.

From the West two reconnaissance operations were reported. They had been made in an attempt to find out the strength of the forward beach fortifications and, obviously, to photograph them. There had been an exchange of shots. It had been thought at first that the forces involved were both German and that they had run into one another. But later, a flash-lamp, shovels, and an American torch had been found, so it had to be assumed that the Americans had tried to photograph the obstacles.

In a similar operation in the Somme estuary, two English officers had been taken prisoner. Interrogation had revealed that they had landed from a raft, after having been brought over by an M.T.B.

Jodl reported that the heaviest losses were being suffered by the Poles; the English had suffered 50% losses in their attacks, American losses were somewhat smaller, and the French had sustained the smallest losses of all.

That was because they were the best, exclaimed the Fuehrer.

Replying to the Fuehrer, Waizenegger said that there were only insignificant losses to report from Ploesti.

Information had not been received on the Fighter Defence successes.

Air operations had been limited during the day; nevertheless, sizeable attacks had been reported from England.

The Fuehrer then revealed that he had received a message from the Roumanian Government, asking for German help in defence against air attacks. It was couched in "whining tones."

All along it had been Germany which had had to bear the brunt of the fighting. In her task she had not been supported. Germany had wanted to clear the enemy out of Egypt. God knew, she had done her utmost in the East to keep the Russians away from the frontier. The only forces to do any attacking had been German. They (i.e. the Roumanians), must be told that everything possible was being done. Things would have been easier for them, if they had extended their forces as Germany had. They were now paying the price for believing that they would be let off lightly.

/Returning

Returning to events in Italy, the Fuehrer said that the extent of the enemy's losses revealed "their miserable handling" of the operations. After all, what were a few mountain positions? Monte Cassino would never have fallen had it not been for the break-through in the south. He did not believe the claim that 500 men of the parachute division had been taken prisoner.

Losses such as these reported showed that the enemy was badly led. Experience in the East had shown that after six days of uninterrupted fighting the first assault troops were gone. Everything depended on securing a break-through in the first three days.

END OF CONFERENCE.

A.H.B.6. Distribution.

Same as for Translation No. VII/49.