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~~SECRET~~AIR HISTORICAL BRANCHTRANSLATION NO. VII/ITHE EFFECTS AND RESULTS OF THE USE OFELEMENTS OF THE STRATEGIC LUFTWAFFEIN DIRECT SUPPORT OF THE ARMY

A Study prepared by the German Air Historical Branch

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The primary task of a strategic air force is the conduct of offensive warfare against the air forces of the enemy, his armament industry, lines of communication and other targets of economic importance. This was effected so rapidly in the 1939 Polish Campaign that the Luftwaffe was also able to give direct support to the army. In France, Norway and the Balkans, strategic aerial warfare was not carried to an altogether satisfactory conclusion, but close support attacks by bomber and dive-bomber formations on targets of importance indicated by the army were nevertheless carried out. The absolute necessity for such attacks was not always apparent; had it been necessary the army could, in most cases, have carried on without the help of the Luftwaffe. These operations, however, showed clearly the enormous and unlimited extent to which such attacks could assist the army; dive bomber formations, in particular, did splendid work in this sphere.

2. The problem of how far direct air support was absolutely necessary had not been determined by the beginning of the Russian Campaign and no rigid plan for ground support attacks operating to the possible exclusion of strategic bombing had been drawn up. The campaign therefore began with strategic bombing against the Soviet Air Force, bombing of airfields in enemy use, attacks on Moscow and large scale raids on enemy aircraft production centres. The demands of the army were also met as far as it was possible and practical to do so.

3. The whole situation was altered by the ever-growing Russian counter-offensive. The attacks carried out with maximum strength by the Russians in the Winter of 1941-42 placed the German Army in a position where it became imperative that all available forces should be used purely for defensive purposes. The lack of ground attack and dive-bomber formations led to the employment of bomber units against concentrations of Russian troops, salients and tank and artillery emplacements. For these tasks the "Nahkampfführer", later called "Fliegerdivisionen", were created. To these were subordinated the few available available ground attack and dive-bomber formations along with an ever increasing number of bomber Geschwader, with the task of supporting the hard pressed infantry in defensive warfare. How great the necessity for all-out support to the infantry had become is shown by the creation early in 1942 of the Luftwaffe Feldeinheiten (Air Force Field Units), without whose assistance the situation in the East could hardly have been mastered.

4. Both offensive and defensive operations in 1942 proved once again the necessity of extensive direct support of the army by bomber formations of the Luftwaffe, and the same experience was had in the African theatre of war.

5. Further developments in the Eastern Front situation during the retreat in the Summer and Autumn of 1943 when the Front was being straightened, necessitated ever greater co-operation by the Luftwaffe with the ground forces. The added urgency of the position is due not to any inferiority of our own infantry but to the overwhelming superiority of the Russians in men and material. The result of this is that all formations of the strategic Luftwaffe on the Eastern Front are engaged in supporting the army in its fight against Russian superiority and that no forces are therefore available for strategic air warfare. This means that no operations are possible against the Russian Hinterland, industry and communications. The Russian war machine is able to run at full speed, war production is unimpaired and supplies can reach the Front without difficulty. The great moral value of strategic bombing is therefore lost; even a few severe attacks can introduce a feeling of insecurity and unrest which can have disturbing results on the whole economy of a nation. At present the Russians are able to work undisturbed and in complete security in the Hinterland. Furthermore, as a result of the withdrawal the distance between the Front and the industrial regions of Eastern Germany has become so small that the possibility of Russian air attacks against the industrial areas of Upper Silesia and Poland, and also against German Baltic harbours must

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be considered. In spite of the destruction of bases carried out by us during the retreat, the Russians are capable, as is known by experience, of harnessing all conceivable resources and reconstructing these bases for attacks on German industries in the East. This they will be able to achieve without interference from the Luftwaffe.

6. These very circumstances demand a speedy and complete release of these formations of the strategic air force for the resumption of offensive warfare. Consideration of existing and future fronts renders this demand more imperative. On the Italian Front it is essential to employ ground attack formations in order to permit both strategic and ground support operations.

7. Apart from the Russian and Italian Fronts the preparations for an Anglo-American invasion raised the possibility of a Third Front. To combat an invasion attempt which is certain to be supported by strong infantry and airborne forces, powerful ground attack forces will be required for action against the enemy during landing operations and also against airborne troops behind the immediate coastal zone, particularly in view of the small forces available to us and the narrowness of the combat zone. The bomber units now operating against England will also, from the very start of the invasion, have to be employed against the enemy landings. However, after the abandonment of the strategic war against Russia, the units hitherto employed in the East will be available for operations against England.

8. A further result of the use of the Luftwaffe in support of the army is the unnecessary employment of valuable and highly trained crews. Knowledge and skill acquired in long and costly training in navigation and long distance bombing is by the very nature of ground attack operations completely wasted. Not only is navigational dexterity and practice lost on missions where only visual observation is necessary (the crew knows its sector of the front and there is no necessity, and often no opportunity, for complex navigational methods) but mental aptitude is also very often diminished.

9. The ground attack pilot has the task of attacking enemy positions, salients and even infantry and tanks with bombs and cannon fire. The aircraft designed for strategic bombing are unsuited for such missions. Bombs dropped from a great height can only be used successfully if a saturation attack is made, and in any case recognition of small targets is difficult from such an altitude. If employed on low level attacks, these bombers, even when protected by fighters, suffer losses altogether disproportionate to the success which they achieve. Aircraft specially designed for this type of combat, such as the FW 190, are necessary, and these can operate without fighter escort. The Ju 87 cannot even be considered for ground strafing purposes in view of its low speed and the formidable flak and fighter defences now encountered. The Reichsmarschall has ordered that its production be discontinued and replaced by that of FW.190's.

10. Urgent consideration should therefore be given to the problem of whether a number of FW 190's originally intended for use as fighters should not be allocated as ground attack aircraft with a view to building up a strong ground attack force for the following purposes:-

- (i) To help the army in its difficult defensive struggle and its later offensive campaigns with the best weapon available at the present time. (FW 190).
- (ii) To free bomber crews as soon as possible for their own tasks.
- (iii) To employ aircraft which are costly to produce and ill-suited for ground attack, more reasonably and in a way more compatible with their possibilities than has been done hitherto.